

# **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL BUYING – A STUDY ON EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED DURING VENDOR EVALUATION**

**Abstract:** Emotions experienced during vendor evaluation in an organizational buying scenario are assessed and those which may influence decision making identified. The interaction of employee age and gender to assess how it influences a buying center executive's emotional experience has also been explored. Empirical study conducted during the research indicates that buying center executives experience certain emotions during vendor evaluation. Though the emotions experienced by different age groups in a buying context remain the same, the level of emotional experience varies. Further, gender does not play a role in the emotions experienced in an organizational buying scenario.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Customer Experience, B2B, Age Group, Gender

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## INTRODUCTION

Executive - vendor relationship frameworks usually adopt traditional, commodity, manufacturing or service economy view which is organization centric to represent choice in terms of cognitive elements. Research has shown that decision making is not only associated with cognitive portion of the human brain but also with emotions (Damasio, 1994; Zajonc, 1980). In an industrial buying scenario, the emotional part is generally influenced by relationship marketing which influences customer retention and wallet share (Heskett et. al., 1994; Liljander & Strandvik, 1995). The interaction process during relationship marketing builds up an emotional bond between the buyer and the seller and leads to a successful relationship strategy (Gronroos, 1996, 2007). While emotions are biological and observed in all people, researchers have focused in both the physical experience of emotion (Scherer, 1988) as well as social context of emotion (Hochschild, 1983). Earlier studies have also suggested the use of affect in marketing communications directed towards B2B markets as both emotional and cognitive individual responses of the buying center members to such marketing communication results in personal influence strategies adopted by the buying center members at the time of joint decision (Gilliland & Johnston, 1997). In a social context, emotions result from dynamic relationships with the social system and are created and recreated throughout the interaction leading to a contextual experience (Gallois, 1993). Since an organizational buying scenario is also a process involving social exchange in terms of the buying center members coming together from different parts of the organization to decide on the best possible solution for the problem in hand and involves interaction not only amongst these members but also with the vendors as well as other members in the organization, we posit that emotions will have a role to play in organizational decision making.

Physical survival and psychological well-being of humans depends on their interactions with each other building relationships and an emotional connect where decisions are guided by emotions (J Fitness, 2015). Similar to a social context where positive emotions help in building relationships and negative emotions break relationships, positive emotions in an organizational buying scenario will lead to an enhanced service experience while negative emotions will have far reaching effect which can damage an organization's image, impact customer loyalty (Wong, 2004; Roos et al, 2009), purchase intention and attitude of consumer towards the company (Davidow, 2003). It can also influence customer complaint behavior (Svari and Erling, 2012) or act as a trigger to customer switching (Roos and Friman, 2008). It is hence important to ensure a positive customer experience during every interaction between the organization and the customer. An exploratory research done earlier to explore customer experience in B2B markets revealed that emotions do play a role in decision making (Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). However details of emotions which may be relevant or a scale to measure emotions in an organizational buying situation is not yet explored academically. This research attempts to bridge the above gap by conducting an empirical study to verify role of emotions in an individual executive experiential journey and assess the emotions which are relevant in an organizational buying situation. Further, since age and gender has been found to moderate employee work attitudes (Chen & Francesco, 2000; Peltokorpi et.al., 2015), we also explore if gender and age has an influence on the emotional experience of an executive in a buying situation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotions are considered to influence not only thinking, social relationships, well-being, physical and mental health, but also decision making and actions (Izard, 2010). They are a powerful psychological force and affect the consumer's behavior as well as the behavior and performance of the seller (Brown et. al., 1997). Rentz et al. (2002) state that the most knowledgeable, adaptive and cognitively gifted salesperson is likely to perform poorly without the ability to gauge a consumer's emotional state. Findings from research conducted by Salovey & Mayer (1990) indicate that individuals who can assess emotional information are more quick and effective while responding to emotions expressed by others. Sellers can achieve the desired outcome from an interaction with a customer by recognizing the emotions consumers' exhibit and reacting accordingly. Adaptive and customer oriented selling techniques can be used by the seller to influence consumer decision. Kidwell et. al. (2007) noted that while high perceiving ability of consumer's emotional state is beneficial for selling, low perceiving ability limits the use of customer oriented selling and has a negative impact on sales performance. 'Emotion' is hence an important construct in a buying situation as it not only impacts the ongoing purchase but also affects future purchases.

Theoretical and research contributions of past studies has helped emotions to be established as a legitimate area of scientific enquiry in the field of marketing. Various theories on how emotions affect human behaviour have been proposed in the past by scholars working in the field of psychology. Izard (1981) proposed the differential emotions theory according to which ten fundamental emotions – 7 negative, 2 positive and 1 neutral, constitute human motivational system. Plutchik (1980) in his circular model of emotion provided a structural model describing the interrelation among emotions. His model proposed 8 primary emotions – 4 negative, 2 positive and 2 neutral and all other emotions as a mix of the primary emotions. Russel & Mehrabian (1977) proposed the PAD model which has 3 dimensions: pleasure – displeasure, arousal – non arousal and dominance – submissiveness. These dimensions characterize all emotional states including moods, feelings and any other feeling related concepts. Watson & Tellegen (1985) proposed the PANAS model (positive and negative affect schedule) according to which positive and negative affect are the two primary emotional dimensions which are mutually independent. Edell and Burke (1987) developed a 3 dimensional model to measure the effects of advertisements on consumers. The dimensions of emotions considered by them were – upbeat, negative and warm feelings. Aaker et al. (1988) developed a model which identifies thirty one feeling clusters (sixteen positive and fifteen negative) to represent the consumer response to advertisements. It focused on less intense feelings rather than stronger emotions and used cluster approach. Batra and Holbrook (1990) developed a model which provides affective response categories to profile the advertisements. Twelve affective responses evoked by advertising messages were identified. Emotional response was organized into dimensions of pleasure (pride, joy, gratitude etc.), arousal (interest, surprise, involvement etc.) and domination (fear, disgust, sadness etc.). These discussions indicate that researchers in marketing have also explored the effect of emotions on consumer behavior.

Emerging definitions of emotion structurally recognize it to constitute neural circuits and neurobiological processes, phenomenal experience or feelings and a perceptual-cognitive process

(Izard, 2010). Further, emotions significantly lead to motivation, social interaction and adaptive behavior in an individual and can be caused by various stimuli like cognitive appraisals as well as ongoing cognition (Izard, 2010). Scherer (2009) defines emotion as a cultural and psychobiological adaptation allowing an individual's flexible and dynamic reaction to an environmental contingency. The emotion process involves appraisal of the environmental contingency driving the somatic nervous system (SNS), the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and motivation leading to formation of a feeling, the quality, intensity and duration of which will depend on the inputs from the appraisal system (Scherer, 2009). An organizational buying situation, involves appraisal of the product or service being purchased by the buyer. It would hence result in an affective experience as well along with the cognitive experience. The learning during evaluation process as well as the feelings evoked during this learning manifest as customer experience, a continuous process operating at multiple stages of buyer decision (Bassi & Guido, 2006; Puccinellie et al., 2009).

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were amongst the early researchers who argued the experiential aspects of consumption. Until then marketers and scholars professed the information processing model of bounded rationality. They contrasted the prevailing information processing model view with an experiential view which professed hedonic nature of consumption directed towards pursuing fantasies, feelings and fun. Arnould & Price (1993), Holt (1995), Joy and Sherry (2003) are some more researchers who have found evidence of the hedonic aspect of consumption experience. Another dimension of experience which has been explored by researchers like Hui & Bateson (1991), Jones (1999), Janda et al.(2002), Arnold et al. (2005), Ofir and Simonson (2007) is the shopping and service experience which entails the sales people interaction aspect as well as the store atmospherics. The product experience by a consumer has been explored by Ellsworth & Smith (1988), Hoch & Ha (1986) and Hoch (2002) by researching on the feelings of consumers when they directly or indirectly (through advertisements) interact with a product. Brakus et. al. (2009) conceptualized brand experience as sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavior responses. They constructed a brand scale which includes four dimensions – sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral. Brodie et al. (2011) considered emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions while discussing the concept of customer engagement in creating customer experience. These discussions highlight emotional experience as one of the dimensions of customer experience.

Most of the studies done on customer experience present buying situations involving business and the consumer (B2C scenario). Role of affect in organizational buying (B2B scenario) is still unexplored though some of the organizational buying behavior models propose both task (cognitive, functional) and non-task (social, emotional, political) related factors in vendor evaluation (Webster & Wind, 1972; Sheth, 1973). The closest theorizing and testing of affect in executive-vendor relationships has been in terms of relationship marketing concept. Executive - vendor relationships involves buyers searching for and building relationships with vendors targeting both financial and strategic gains (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). While vendor relationships were seen as a key to competitive advantage (McKenna, 1993; Vavra, 1992; Nauman, 1995), corporates started moving towards relationship orientation forming value creating networks (Iacobucci D, 1996). Pandey & Mookerjee (2018) have extended the concept of customer experience to an organizational buying scenario and conducted an exploratory research with industrial participants. Their findings indicate that emotions play a role in B2B markets. Further, recent studies have classified emotions as more hedonic versus those that rely

on higher order self-conscious processes to arise. Hung and Mukhopadhyay (2012) have demonstrated that the intensity of emotions experienced by an individual depends on whether they are the actors or observers of the situation. They found that an actor experiences more intense hedonic emotions like sadness or excitement while an observer experiences more intense self-conscious emotions like embarrassment or guilt. This concept can be extended to a B2B organizational buying scenario, where the buying center members are actively involved in negotiations with the vendor as well as to assess the vendors' response, and hence can be considered to be both actors as well as observers of the situation. They would then experience both hedonic as well as self-conscious emotions at the time of vendor evaluation.

Various scales are available in literature to measure emotional experience like DES scale, PAD scale, PANAS, consumer emotional intelligence scale (CEIS), scales to measure brand attachment, hedonism and novelty. To assess the range of emotions most frequently experienced in consumption situations, Consumption Emotion Set (CES) scale was developed (Richins, 1997). The third version of CES scale consists of 56 emotional descriptors grouped in 29 clusters of emotions. Items (emotion) are scored on a 4 point scale from 0 (never) to 3 (often). The CES scale has a comprehensive set of emotions which can be used to measure the intensity of emotional experience. CES scales have been used in B2C scenarios to evaluate the emotions experienced during individual product consumption (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Ruth et. al., 2002; Thomson et. al., 2005; Sweeney & Souter, 2001). Since a B2B scenario also involves buying center members assessing the product or service at an individual level prior to coming together for a joint decision, we can extend the use of CES scale to measure the intensity of emotions experienced by an individual assessor in a B2B scenario.

This brings us to our first set of propositions -

***Proposition 1:*** Vendor evaluation during organizational buying leads to an emotional experience

***Proposition 2:*** Emotions experienced in a B2B vendor evaluation situation can be assessed using dimensions represented in the CES scale

Hur et. al. (2014) conducted a study on how age and work experience affect emotional labor strategies through emotional intelligence. Emotional labor is defined as the process of emotional management at work in order to fulfill the emotional expression requirements within an organization (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). It is the management of feeling into observable behavior (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and emotions an organization deems desirable. Socioemotional selectivity theory (SST) posits that as people age, they are motivated to maximize experiencing positive emotions as against negative emotions. Hence aging can be related to emotional labor and a certain directionality of emotions as one ages can be expected. Employees emotional capability (Emotional Intelligence) can affect the emotional labor. Employees with high level of emotional intelligence engage in deep acting for emotional labor rather than surface acting (Liu et. al., 2008). Age has been found to affect work related attitudes (Kooij et. al., 2008; Warr, 1992) and younger workforce as compared to older workforce has stronger motivation for job characteristics, outcomes and accomplishment. Further, empirical studies suggest older people understand and control their emotions better as compared to younger people (Ng & Feldman, 2009) implying intensity effects of age on arousal of emotions.

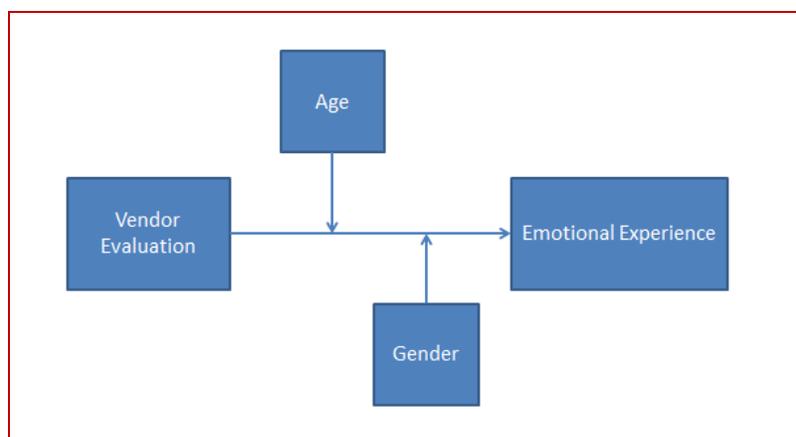
Difference between male and female leadership styles has been explored by various scholars (Apesteguia et. al., 2012; Amagoh, 2009; Grisoni & Beeby, 2007; Appelbaum et. al., 2003; Yammarion et. al, 1997). Studies indicate women to be more expressive emotionally as compared to men (Vecchio, 2002; Van Rooy et. al., 2004). Alonso & Bremser (2015) explored management decision making from gender perspective in a financial crisis and found that there is a difference in strategic management decisions in crisis time and the choice made. Observations made in this study indicate that men and women employ different strategies for decision making. Hence it may be assumed they would interpret the same information differently and go through different emotional experience. The leadership style of men & women is different leading to different business decisions (Hackman et. al., 1992; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). The difference is also due to the way men & women analyze situation to make decisions (Grisoni & Beeby, 2007). Female managers usually lead by being interpersonally oriented as compared to male managers who usually are task oriented (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Powell & Graves, 2003), with consequently different paths and contexts of emotional arousal as mentioned earlier on, perhaps thereby having a different set of emotions, intensity, quality and direction than the other gender. This also reflects in the day to day business routines (Grisony & Beeby, 2007) where men prefer centralized decision making while women prefer a participative decision making (Bird & Brush, 2002; Eagly and Johnson, 1990) which helps to maintain employee motivation (Barbuto et. al., 2007; Griso & Beeby, 2007; Davis et. al., 2010) and leads to long term client relationships (Krishnan & Park, 2005; Schaap et. al., 2008). These discussions indicate that men and women tend to make decisions consistent with gender specific styles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Melero, 2011) and are likely to experience different emotions with different consequences in similar purchase situations in buying centers.

The above discussions suggest that age and gender influences emotional experience and extending this to a B2B purchase scenario, we draw our next set of propositions as follows -

**Proposition 3:** Buying center member age influences emotional experience in B2B

**Proposition 4:** Buying center member gender influences emotional experience in B2B

The model proposed for testing is represented in Figure 1.



**Figure – 1: Emotional Experience in B2B Vendor Evaluation**

## RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Three studies were conducted with industry participants to simulate vendor-buyer interaction scenario. The first study simulated a situation where buyers evaluate response from two vendors to a given request for proposal (RFP). The second study simulated a situation where buyers evaluate the response of each vendor to queries raised by buyer post evaluation of each vendor response in the first study. The final study involved buyers evaluating the best and final offer given by each vendor. On completion of vendor evaluation at the end of each study, the respondents were given a questionnaire indicating all emotions as per CES scale (Richins, 1997) and asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced each of these emotions during the assessment process – never, rarely, sometimes or often. The response was coded in a scale of 0 to 3, where 0 indicated that the emotion was never experienced, 1 indicated it was rarely experienced, 2 indicated it was experienced sometimes and 3 indicated it was often experienced. The 56 emotion items were reduced to 29 emotional clusters by summing the score of items under each cluster and dividing it by the total number of items in that cluster. To test propositions 1 & 2, the following hypothesis were framed –

*H1: Mean of emotions experienced during vendor evaluation will be greater than zero*

*H2: Mean for each emotion cluster will be significantly greater than zero indicating that it is relevant in B2B*

Drawing from literature review, the following hypothesis were framed to test propositions 3 & 4 –

*H3: The mean of emotions experienced will reduce with age of the buying center member*

*H4: The mean of emotions experienced by female buying center members will be significantly different as compared to the mean of same emotion experienced by male buying center members*

Demographic data collected during the research was used to test the above hypothesis. The sample was grouped into three cohorts based on their age. All respondents in the age group 21 to 29 years (born between the years 1988 to 1997) were considered as generation Z, those between 30 to 39 years (born between the years 1978 to 1987) as generation Y and those above 40 years (born before the year 1978) as generation X. Three cohorts were considered to evaluate how emotional experience varies with age.

## DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

127 participants were involved in the first study and 77 of these continued to participate in studies two and three as well. Response from all the three studies was used for the analysis. Findings indicate that there is no emotion cluster where mean is zero indicating that all emotions as per CES scale were experienced to some extent. This supports our first two hypotheses, H1 and H2 and indicates that emotions are experienced at individual level by buying center members during vendor evaluation and mean of each emotion cluster will be greater than zero.

It is further observed that mean value of ten of the emotion clusters (Sadness, Fear, Shame, Envy, Loneliness, Romantic Love, Guilty, Helpless, Longing and Nostalgic) is less than 0.5 indicating very low to negligible levels of its presence in the given situation. It can hence be concluded that these ten emotion clusters may be irrelevant in a B2B situation. The remaining emotion clusters fall between a value of 0.5 to 1.0 except for five emotion clusters (Peacefulness, Contentment, Optimism, Joy and Excitement) where the mean value is greater than one indicating that these emotions were frequently experienced by the buying center members in this scenario. We can hence conclude that emotions are experienced at an individual level during vendor evaluation and a modified CES scale may be used to determine the intensity of emotions. The results are summarized in Table – 1.

<b>N</b>	<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>
552	Anger	.514	.693	.029
550	Discontent	.672	.824	.035
552	Worry	.534	.705	.030
552	Sadness	.364	.619	.026
552	Fear	.389	.636	.027
551	Shame	.306	.594	.025
548	Envy	.329	.613	.026
550	Loneliness	.304	.602	.026
551	Romantic Love	.370	.603	.026
552	Love	.590	.718	.031
553	Peacefulness	1.335	1.022	.043
550	Contentment	1.265	.966	.041
553	Optimism	1.416	.932	.040
551	Joy	1.261	.958	.041
551	Excitement	1.069	.899	.038
549	Surprise	.760	.785	.033
550	Guilty	.344	.688	.029
550	Proud	.676	.854	.036
548	Eager	.819	.922	.039
547	Relieved	.885	.920	.039
543	Awed	.551	.774	.033
549	Carefree	.634	.858	.037
546	Comforted	.866	.934	.040
546	Helpless	.412	.696	.030
546	Impatient	.504	.767	.033
546	Longing	.474	.735	.031
544	Nostalgic	.381	.690	.030
548	Protective	.599	.833	.036
550	Wishful	.793	.957	.041

*Table – 1: Emotional Experience in B2B Vendor Evaluation*

To test hypothesis 3 & 4, the interactions of age and gender with means of each of the 19 relevant emotion clusters was determined using SPSS. The results indicate that while age and gender impacts the emotions experienced, there is also an interaction effect of age and gender on emotions. While certain emotions like anger, discontent, worry and impatience are experienced more prominently in case of males, emotions like love, peacefulness, contentment, optimism, joy, excitement, surprise, proud, awed, eager, carefree, comforted and protective are more prominent in females. Theory also suggests that females are more interpersonally oriented (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Powell & Graves, 2003) and emotions like love, peacefulness, optimism etc. which are more interpersonal oriented support these findings. The intensity of emotions experienced also varies with age as well as gender (Ng & Feldman, 2009; Kooij et. al., 2008; Warr, 1992). In case of a few emotions like discontent, anger, impatient and worry, the mean levels were found to be lower for older employees as compared to younger employees. For most of the other emotions, the mean levels of emotions experience by older employees were higher than that of younger employees. There is no fixed pattern indicating that emotions experienced reduce with age. We hence partially accept hypothesis 3.

Certain emotions experienced by female members were higher than that of males for the same situation of customer evaluation in a buying center. This is in line with some studies which have indicated that emotions are gender neutral (Simon & Nath, 2004; Brody, 1997; Shields, 1995). However, a significant difference in the emotions experienced by male and female participants was visible. We hence accept hypothesis 4.

Interactions for four of these emotions are shown in Figure – 2.

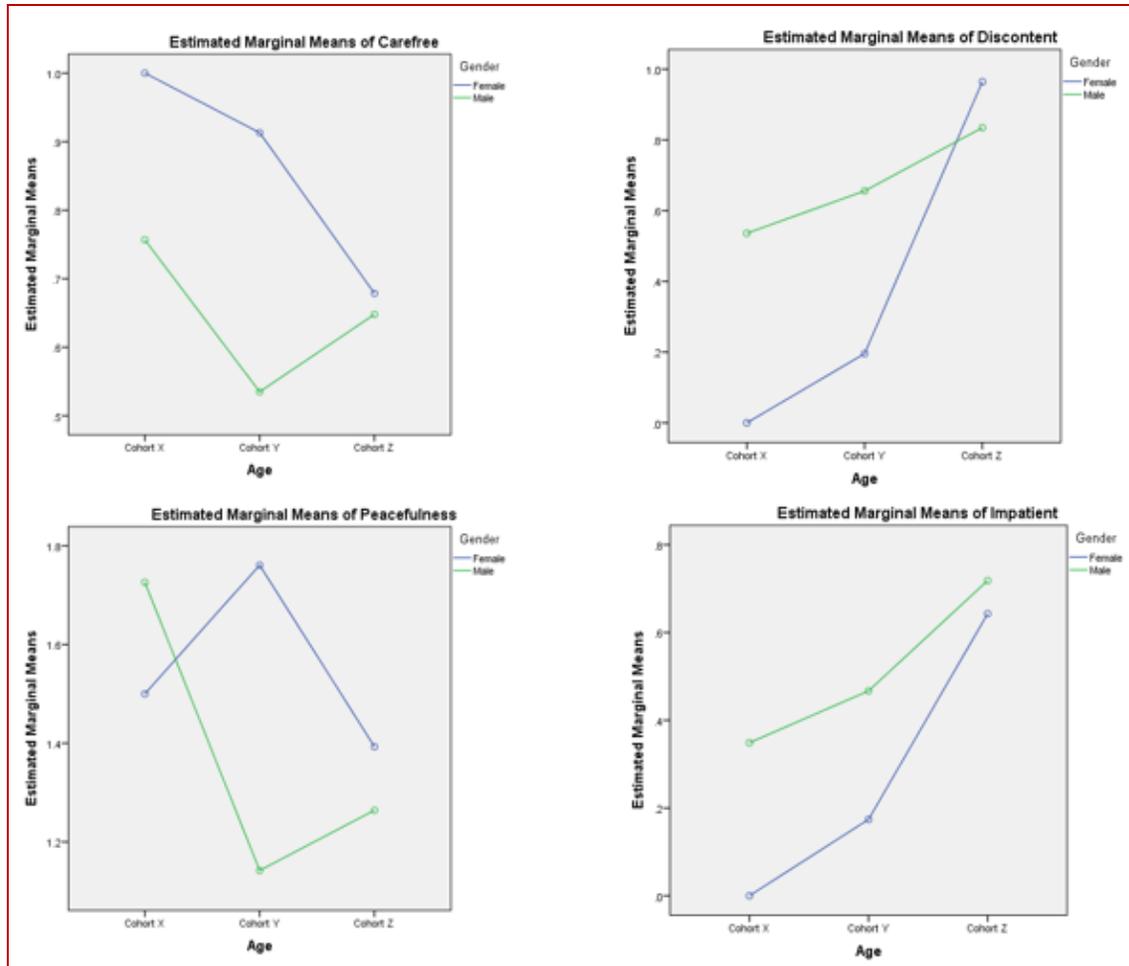
## **ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

The research employs CES scale to measure emotions experienced by individual buying center members in an organizational buying scenario. It also elicits prominent emotions which are relevant in an organizational buying situation, opening avenues for future studies in terms of developing a scale for emotions relevant to organizational buying and exploring the role of emotions in formation of behavioral intent and final vendor selection for organizational buying. The research also attempts to study the impact of age and gender on individual emotions of a buying center member. While the study helps to establish presence of emotions in a B2B scenario, it also indicates that though age and gender play a role in the emotions experienced by individual members of the buying center, it has no correlation with previous studies on the findings about interactions of age and gender with emotions.

## **MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Marketers can benefit from this research by understanding the emotional experience relevant in organizational buying and accordingly strategize their interactions with executives during vendor evaluation process. As shown in the study, emotional experience in an organizational buying situation is different amongst the various age cohorts and gender. This can

impact the individual choice and lead to conflict in the buying center when all members come together for the joint decision.



*Figure – 2: Interactions of age & gender with emotions in B2B Vendor Evaluation*

## CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Findings indicate that emotions do play a role in an individual executive experiential journey. Further, age and gender do not play a role in the emotions experienced by buying center members during vendor evaluation. Though emotions were measured during this research using retrospective methods, future research may be conducted using autonomic measures. It was also seen that not all emotion clusters of CES scale are relevant in a B2B scenario. Researchers may work on developing a scale to measure emotions in organizational buying. A research may also be carried out to understand the emotional pattern with age in organizational buying and why age and gender do not play a role in the emotions experienced.

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