Forms of Expression of Angry Voters and Sad Voters: The Effects of Discrete Emotions and Emotional Expression on the Voting Participation through Approach-Avoidance Action Tendencies

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Abstract

Despite the proliferation of studies on emotion, little attention has been paid to the effects of discrete emotion on political participation. Using a representative survey conducted on a sample of South Korean citizens in the aftermath of the Sewol ferry accident, the current survey explored how anger and sadness, as well as the ways people express those emotions, influence the orientation of their response in social environments and, ultimately, their voting intention. The results partially supported the discrete effects of sadness and anger in eliciting reactions of approach or avoidance. Anger was found to provoke an approach action tendency in independent voters and supporters of the opposition, while also eliciting an avoidance action tendency with a varying effect size across all three groups of respondents. Sadness also prompted an approach action tendency in independents and supporters of the incumbent party, while it manifested a negative association with the avoidance action tendency in supporters of the opponent party. An interpretation of the findings and proposed directions for future research are presented.

Keywords: emotion, anger and sadness, emotional expression, approach and avoidance, fight or flight, voting intention

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It is a common knowledge that the way people feel often has a great influence on how they perceive and react to their environment. Recent studies on discrete emotion, an attribute distinguished from other affective experiences such as personality traits, moods, or sensory experiences, have posited that emotions are effective predictors of various bodily responses (e.g., Ekman, 1993; Keltner, 1995; Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008). Scholars have examined the discrete displays of different emotions in people's cognitive and behavioral mechanisms (e.g., Malhotra & Kuo, 2009; Marcus, 2003). However, limited attempts have been made to relate those emotions to people's actual action or inaction in terms of social and political activities, such as voting in elections.

Using survey data collected from a representative sample of South Korean citizens shortly after the Sewol ferry accident, which caused nationwide sadness and anger, the current study explores how discrete emotions, along with the ways they are expressed, influence the orientation of people's responses to their social environment, and ultimately, their voting intention. The sinking of the ferry, a tragic accident which occurred on April 16, 2014, aroused all sorts of negative emotions – particularly sadness and anger – in Korean citizens, whose perception of the accident and of the governmental system were presumably influenced by these emotions. The substantial voting participation in the subsequent regional election was influenced by citizens' emotional states and responses triggered by their emotions. On the other hand, some researchers have argued that the anger and sadness aroused by the accident were not reflected in the election results, as the incumbent party won in most regions (Kwaak, 2014).

While the influence of voters' anger and sadness on the election results remains controversial, this study seeks to explore the relationship between discrete emotional states, the orientational responses triggered by each emotion, and the voting participation on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Do anger and sadness gear up individuals for different orientational responses? If so, do these orientational responses ultimately lead to actual voting participation? Referring to the rich body of literature on discrete emotions...
and orientational responses, this study reveals how anger and sadness lead to individual voting intentions through approach-avoidance action tendencies.

The Appraisal Role of Emotions

Although frequently used in everyday conversation, the psychological construct of “emotion” fails to receive a unanimous definition even from psychologists. Despite the variety of definitions of emotion proposed by psychology scholars (e.g. Arnold & Gasson, 1954; Barrett & Campos, 1987; Lazarus, 1991; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990), it is generally agreed that “affective experiences … can be studied at four levels of analysis”: emotional traits, moods, emotions, and sensory experiences (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 318). What differentiates emotions, as manifestations of a third-level analysis of affective experiences, is that they last more briefly and are more context-specific than traits or moods, and, importantly, have a particular cause from intentional objects (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 318).

Scholars have long argued that emotions necessarily involve the appraisal of a particular object (e.g. Arnold & Gasson, 1954). The idea of appraisal, or evaluation, serves as a critical concept for understanding emotions in modern psychology. The appraisal approach to emotion proposed by Lazarus (1991) contains two basic themes, the ‘valence’ and ‘relevance’ evaluations of an event. First, Lazarus (1991) posits emotions as people’s subjective judgments of how good or bad an event is. Second, people’s appraisals also depend on their goals and aspirations, and their interaction with the event (Lazarus, 1991; Oatley, Keltner, & Jenkins, 2006). In sum, emotions represent individuals’ affective experiences that “relate the outer world and the inner self” (Oatley et al., 2006, p. 168). Because emotions “orient people to respond to ongoing events in their environment and … emotions are ‘relational’” (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 318), it is critical to delve into the role emotions play in the ways people perceive ongoing events and take behavioral orientations from and towards the events.
Although emotions have been in the spotlight in recent academic research, political scientists still lament the fact that election studies, one of the “most rational domains of social sciences” (Way & Masters, 1996, p. 52), have hardly considered emotions as important factors influencing citizens’ political thoughts and participation. However, a few studies probing the ways emotions are related to citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors have implied that citizens’ discrete emotions towards candidates predict their candidate preferences more effectively than conventional predictors such as citizens’ issues or ideological assessments (e.g. Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989; Ottati, Steenbergen, & Riggle, 1992; Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, & Sullivan, 1990; Sullivan & Masters, 1988). Unfortunately, prior studies on emotions have tended to focus only on the valence dimension (i.e., positive or negative emotion) while neglecting other important dimensions of emotion, such as arousal and control. More importantly, studies advocating discrete or categorical emotions (e.g. Ekman, 1984) have highlighted that emotions are highly complex phenomena that cannot be explained on a simple positive-negative spectrum. Taking a further step, this study incorporates the dimensional approaches to appraisal in order to illustrate how anger and sadness, two discrete emotional responses to a tragic social event, can elicit different orientational responses and actual behaviors.

**Anger versus sadness: dimensional approaches to emotion**

The recent scholarship on emotions has argued that “core dimensions of appraisal, when combined, give rise to specific emotions” (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 320). Regarding their approaches, many scholars have suggested different sets of dimensions. Smith and Ellsworth (1985) proposed eight dimensions capturing the appraisal processes of emotion: attention, certainty, control coping, pleasantness, perceived obstacle, responsibility, legitimacy, and anticipated effort. Frijda (1999) later reduced those eight dimensions to three: affective valence, arousal or activation, and control or dominance (p. 201). Although the first two dimensions (i.e., valence and arousal), are found to be generally consistent and easily interpretable in most previous studies, this study sheds light on the third dimension...
of ‘control’, a dimension that is also frequently discussed along with a similar term, ‘agency’ (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

The agency dimension is critical in understanding the different responses of anger and sadness, the two emotions of interest in this study. While both emotions are classified as negative affective states and have sometimes been suggested to have similar effects on humans’ cognitive processing (Malhotra & Kuo, 2009), Smith and Ellsworth (1985) pointed out that they are distinguished by the perception of agency, which represents a combination of the control and responsibility dimensions. Anger is characterized as a high level of agency and is triggered when “people perceive some other person to be the cause of their misfortune,” whereas sadness comes with a low level of agency and arises when “people perceive impersonal circumstances beyond human control to be the cause of their misfortune” (Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993, p. 741). In this sense, the two distinctive emotions are plotted at opposite ends on the agency spectrum.

Given that anger and sadness are clearly distinguished on the agency spectrum, it can be predicted that they serve different functions in eliciting responsive actions. The research on emotion has generally agreed that emotions play a functional role in people’s responsive actions. In this sense, Keltner and Lerner (2010) argued that “emotions enable individuals to meet particular threats, challenges, and opportunities within their social environment” (p. 329). Specifically, Keltner and Lerner (2010) predicted that anger leads people to blame others and to be acutely sensitive to unfair actions, while sadness leads people to attribute the same events to “impersonal, situational causes” (p. 336). Recent studies employing neuroimaging technology have confirmed Keltner and Lerner’s prediction, in that anger is related to the activation of the left-frontal regions of the cortex, a brain region that is known to “facilitate approach-related behavior” (Harmon-Jones, Sigelman, Bohlig, & Harmon-Jones, 2003), while sadness is associated with enhanced activity in the left amygdala (Blair, Morris, Frith, Perrett, & Dolan, 1999), a region that is activated for withdrawal rather than approach conditions (Wager, Phan, Liberzon, & Taylor, 2003).
Effects of Emotional Expression

Another large realm of the research on emotion lies in the study of emotional expression. Indeed, people engage in various modes of emotional expression, such as physiological responses (e.g., crying when sad), vocal expression (e.g., groans or sighs), facial expressions (e.g., frowning), and posture (e.g., drooping), as well as verbal articulation (e.g., saying sad things) (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 327). Although a considerable number of studies have looked into bodily displays of discrete emotions by employing encoding or decoding approaches (e.g. Ekman, 1993; Keltner, 1995; Matsumoto et al., 2008), limited attention has been paid to the ways people represent their emotional experiences with “language, concepts, and discourse” (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 326). As derived from clinical narrative research, the idea central to the goal of the present study is that the articulation of one’s emotion in written form can influence how one reacts to an emotional stimulus. Pennebaker (1997) found that people’s writing of their emotional experiences enabled them to reflect on their emotions, to adopt an objective perspective on them, and to understand what triggers specific emotions and what those mean to them. Verbal emotional expression, which is identified as a model of affective adaptation, also enables people to “adapt to the events inasmuch as they attend less to them and have weaker affective reactions” (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008, p. 371).

Given that emotional expression affects people’s interpretation of their own emotions as well as their reactions to the stimuli triggering the emotions, we can safely predict that people’s emotional expression also exerts a significant influence on the ways they respond to stimuli. This study examines how people’s emotions and emotional expression affect their action tendencies, which, in turn, affect their actual behaviors (i.e. voting, in this study’s context; also see Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011; Weber, 2013).
Action Tendency: Avoiding Versus Approaching

The distinction between approach and avoidance action tendencies (or behavior orientations) has been widely researched in relation to stress-coping strategies (e.g., Roth & Cohen, 1986), personality traits (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2002), motivational systems (e.g., Carver, 2006), and neurology (e.g., Olds & Olds, 1963). Regarding people’s avoidance action tendencies, Gray (1970) proposed two contrasting motivational systems, a behavioral activation system (BAS) and a behavioral inhibition system (BIS), corresponding to people’s inherent extraverted or introverted personalities, respectively. Later scholars further extended this distinction and concluded that inter-individual variations in facilitative and inhibitory motivational systems lie in the basic structures of personality (see Depue & Collins, 1999). Regarding emotions as potential influencers, Konorski (1967) suggested that emotions are also driven by two contrasting motivational systems: the appetitive system, which is related to the approach tendency, and the aversive system, which is characterized by behavioral escape and avoidance (Lang, 1995). Measuring affective responses to an external stimulus, Lang (1995) also concluded that the “appetitive (approach) and aversive (withdrawal) systems compete for the brain’s output processes” (p. 381). Likewise, most studies dealing with approach and avoidance as contrasting motivational systems have contended that approach is a positively-motivated behavioral orientation, while avoidance is a negatively-motivated one.

To the best of our knowledge, there have been no studies linking the emotions triggered by external stimuli to people’s approach-avoidance action tendencies. Unfortunately, past studies investigating approach-avoidance action tendencies (e.g., Gray, 1970) have tended to disregard the role of external stimuli and emotional responses towards the stimuli, and studies examining the relationship between emotions and behaviors (e.g., Adams, Ambady, Macrae, & Kleck, 2006) have only focused on the ‘valence’ dimension of emotions, neglecting other dimensions such as agency, the dimension in which anger and sadness are contrasted.
Study Context: The Sewol Ferry Accident in South Korea

The present study was designed in response to a recent event which stirred a mixture of negative emotions in South Korean citizens. A South Korean ferry called Sewol sank in deep sea near the south shore of the peninsula with 476 passengers on board, resulting in nearly 300 casualties. The majority of the victims were high school students on an annual field trip, whose bodies were missing for weeks or months, locked in the sunken ferry. As the story swept through the South Korean news outlets throughout the year and there were more articles related to this subject than any other subject (Korea Press Foundation, 2014), it was revealed that chains of political corruption and bribery were involved behind what had initially appeared to be only a tragic accident.

A mixture of emotional reactions, including anger, frustration, sadness, and guilt, seized the citizens of South Korea. Many of them expressed the emotions they had experienced from the accident to their friends and neighbors and/or on social networking sites. Due to the intense emotional turmoil of Korean citizens, many had expected the accident to influence the outcome of the regional election held on June 4, 2014, nearly two months later. Although some claimed that it exerted little impact on the election outcome (Kwaak, 2014), others concluded that the dominant victory of the challenging party's superintendents of education in 13 out of 17 regions reflected the citizens' disapproval of the current government as a consequence of the Sewol accident (Park, 2014). As Hurricane Katrina eroded President Bush's approval rating and job handling (Malhotra, 2008; Malhotra & Kuo, 2009), the Sewol ferry accident had been acknowledged to influence citizens' evaluation of the current Korean administration and incumbent party. In this sense, people's emotions toward the Sewol ferry accident affected people's political participation.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Summing up the concepts of emotion, emotional expression, and action tendencies, the purpose of this study is to provide an integrated framework for discrete negative emotions
and political action. Although controversies about the effects of the negative emotions triggered by the Sewol accident on the June 2014 election results are still ongoing, few have considered the theoretical framework of how these effects did or did not occur. By focusing on anger and sadness, two negative affective experiences arising as felt consequences of a tragic event, this study also examines the way verbal expression predicts that these two emotions will trigger contrasting action tendencies, i.e., approach versus avoidance, and thus, differently influence the individual voting intention. Our hypothesized model is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Hypothesized Model*

![Hypothesized Model Diagram](image)

According to the existing literature on the functions and consequences of discrete emotions and neurological evidence (e.g., Harmon-Jones et al., 2003), anger is expected to only prompt an approach action tendency, while sadness, which is contrasted with anger on the agency spectrum, should manifest opposite effects, only predicting an avoidance action tendency. In light of this, this study posits that:

**H1a:** People feeling anger about the Sewol incident will show an approach action tendency.

**H1b:** People feeling sadness about the Sewol incident will show an avoidance action tendency.
In order to investigate the role of emotions in electoral participation, this study selects citizens' voting behavior as the most representative form of political action. Based on what is discussed above, voting behavior is expected to be positively related to the approach action tendency triggered by anger, as assumed in H1a. Conversely, the voting behavior is expected to be negatively associated with the avoidance action tendency promoted by sadness, as posited in H1b. Thus, this study postulates the indirect effects of anger and sadness on people's voting behavior through their action tendencies.

H2a: People's anger will indirectly promote their voting behavior by activating their approach action tendency.

H2b: People's sadness will indirectly decrease their voting behavior by activating their avoidance action tendency.

Lastly, this study examines the role of people's emotional expression in the causal relationships between emotions, action tendencies, and voting behavior. Unfortunately, however, this topic has been less discussed in the prior literature, and this study set the relevant research question as follows:

RQ: How does emotional expression influence the relationship between the emotions felt towards the Sewol accident (i.e., anger and sadness) and the approach-avoidance action tendencies?

Method

Sample

The sample of participants was recruited from a private research company, in collaboration with a large private university in South Korea. An online survey was designed to collect the data and was carried out using quota sampling, ensuring even allocation between the age and gender groups. The survey was conducted from May 30 to June 2,
2014, less than two months after the Sewol accident, and one week prior to the regional election held on June 4, 2014. A total of 1,116 responses were obtained and analyzed. All of the participants were eligible to vote in a regional election. The demographic information for the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Demographics

| Variables                         | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender                            |           |         |
| Male                              | 554       | 49.6%   |
| Female                            | 562       | 50.4%   |
| Age                               |           |         |
| 20s                               | 225       | 20.2%   |
| 30s                               | 264       | 23.7%   |
| 40s                               | 292       | 26.2%   |
| 50s                               | 294       | 26.3%   |
| 60s or more                       | 41        | 3.7%    |
| Education                         |           |         |
| High-school or less               | 180       | 16.1%   |
| College (in progress)             | 105       | 9.4%    |
| College degree                    | 699       | 62.6%   |
| Graduate/professional degree      | 132       | 11.8%   |
| Monthly income (won)              |           |         |
| Less than 2 million               | 99        | 8.9%    |
| 2 – 4 million                     | 374       | 33.5%   |
| 4 – 6 million                     | 361       | 32.3%   |
| 6 – 8 million                     | 165       | 14.8%   |
| More than 8 million               | 117       | 10.5%   |
| Party identification              |           |         |
| Incumbent party supporters        | 277       | 24.8%   |
| Opponent party supporters         | 248       | 22.2%   |
| Independents                      | 591       | 53.0%   |

Note. N = 1,116.

The respondents in this study were divided into three groups: independents, incumbent party supporters, and oppositional party supporters. Party identification is
often argued to be a strong influencer of neutral responses, interfering with people’s emotions and behavioral orientations (e.g., Kaplan, Freedman, & Iacoboni, 2007). The supporters of the incumbent party (n = 277), supporters of the opponent party (n = 248), and independent voters (n = 591) were extracted from the sample to create three groups for analysis.

Measures

Voting intention. To assess the respondents’ individual voting intention, the study employed a combined measure which accounted for the dichotomous item of whether “I will cast a vote in the regional election on June 4, 2014” or “I will not...”, and a three-point scale item assessing the certainty of a respondent’s voting intention (1 = maybe, 3 = certainly). The measure resulted in a four-point scale representing those who reported that they would not cast a vote, those who said that they might, those who reported they would, and those who responded that they would certainly take part in voting (M = 1.72, SD = 1.14).

Approach and avoidance action tendencies. The measures for the approach and avoidance action tendencies were created to reflect the specific context of the Sewol accident. The two items comprising the approach action tendency were “As I watched the news about the Sewol ferry, I thought that I should help improve the risk management system of South Korea” and “If I encounter any risky issues from now on, I will demand the improvement of the risk management system.” The avoidance action tendency was also measured with two items: ‘As I watched the news about the Sewol ferry, I wanted to leave the country” and “If there is an opportunity, I want to migrate to another country.” All the items were assessed on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

3 Basically, ‘leaving the country’ in the two items was operationally defined as the respondents’ avoidance action tendency. On one hand, it is true that ‘leaving the country,’ by itself, may not be an inhibitory action. On the other hand, it can be interpreted as ‘inhibitory behavior’ because leaving the country inhibits the respondents from participating politically in electoral contexts.
agree). The mean score for the approach action tendency was 4.21 (SD = .74, r = .58), and the avoidance tendency showed a mean score of 3.22 (SD = 1.24, r = .81).

**Anger and sadness.** Each discrete emotion was measured by combining four and three self-reported items, respectively. Anger consisted of four items: “When thinking about the Sewol accident, I feel angry,” “…like I am going crazy,” “…hostile,” and “…irritated,” and sadness was comprised of three items: “When thinking about the Sewol accident, I feel sad,” “…suffocated,” “…sorrowful.” For each item, a seven-point Likert scale response format (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) was used. The anger (Cronbach’s α = .85) and sadness (Cronbach’s α = .93) scales both demonstrated good reliability. The mean scores for the anger and sadness resulted in 5.17 (SD = 1.27) and 5.96 (SD = 1.12), respectively.

**Emotional expression.** The scale consisted of three items reflecting different modes and levels of expression. Face-to-face conversation, i.e., ‘talking’ about one’s emotions with friends and neighbors, and online expression, i.e., ‘posting’ messages about one’s emotion and ‘endorsing’ someone else’s messages by clicking the like or share buttons, were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The three items produced good reliability (Cronbach’s α = .75), and the mean score was 3.17 (SD = .96).

**Control variables.** As well as demographic variables such as gender, age, education, and income, the respondents’ general attitude toward politics was also introduced as a control variable, and all were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). One’s voting behavior is undeniably greatly influenced by one’s general attitude toward politics, as well as socio-demographic factors, party affiliation, and the perception of one’s specific environment (Campbell et al., 1960). Although this study focuses on the individual responses to a specific event, it would be too bold to assume that Korean citizens’ voting behavior was only influenced by their transient reaction to the Sewol accident. Therefore, the following measures were included as control variables.
First, the political efficacy was measured with four items: “People like me do not have any influence on what the government does,” “Politics and administration are too complex for people like me to understand,” “There is nothing that people like me can do to influence what the government does except voting in elections,” and “The government is not interested in the thoughts of people like me” (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .78 \)). The mean score was 3.22 (SD = .76). The level of political cynicism was computed by using the mean score of two items: “Politicians, once they get elected, tend to lose touch with their voters” and “Political parties are only interested in winning the election, not in what citizens think” (M = 4.19, SD = .81, r = .76). Lastly, political trust consisted of six items, including “Most politicians are worthy of trust,” “Politicians try to listen to what their voters think,” and “Politicians make the right decisions for our country” (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .84 \)). The mean score for political trust was 1.94 (SD = .72).

**Results**

To detect the effects of emotions on the approach and avoidance action tendencies and, ultimately, on voting intention, multiple ordinary least square (OLS) models were applied to each party identification group. In general, the results partly supported the hypothesized model, showing differing effects between different discrete emotions and the ways those emotions interact with expressive behaviors to produce varying results. Although the link between emotions and action tendencies posited in this study was verified, its magnitude was weak. Interestingly, the results varied according to the respondents’ party identification.

First, anger significantly affected the approach action tendency of both independents (b = .12, p < .001) and oppositional party supporters (b = .25, p < .001), as shown in Table 2. However, anger had no effect on the approach action tendency (b = .08, p = n.s.) of respondents supporting the incumbent party. Belying our hypothesis, sadness significantly increased the approach action tendency of independents (b = .15, p < .001) and incumbent party
supporters (b = .23, p < .001), but not that of opponent party supporters (b = .07, p = n.s.). In short, while anger and sadness both promoted an approach action tendency in independent voters, anger was only effective in increasing the approach action tendency of opponent party supporters, and sadness only promoted an approach action tendency in incumbent party supporters. Those results demonstrated that only independents and opponent party supporters were influenced by anger to adopt an approach action tendency, in contrast with sadness, which was only effective on independents and incumbent party supporters. Thus, H1a was only partially supported.

Regarding our research question about the effect of emotional expression on the relationship between emotions and approach action tendencies, the results in Table 2 show that there were statistically significant interaction effects between anger and emotional expression on the approach action tendency of independents (b = .07, p < .05), but not on that of the other two groups (b = .05 for incumbent party supporters, and b = .01 for opponent party supporters, p's = n.s.). In other words, anger’s positive effect on the approach action tendency augmented the level of anger about the Sewol ferry sinking in the respondents without a particular party affiliation. However, emotional expression did not influence the relationship between sadness and the approach action tendency in any of the three party identification groups.
Table 2

Results of OLS regression models predicting approach action tendency

| Control measures     | Independents (n = 591) | Incumbent party supporters (n = 277) | Opponent party supporters (n = 248) |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                      | Model 1                | Model 2                              | Model 1                             |
|                      | Model 2                | Model 2                              | Model 2                             |
| Intercept            | 3.76*** (.31)          | 4.19*** (.29)                        | 3.59*** (.44)                       |
|                      |                       |                                     | 4.13*** (.41)                       |
|                      |                       |                                     | 4.07*** (.42)                       |
|                      |                       |                                     | 4.40*** (.35)                       |
| Gender               | .17*** (.06)           | .04 (.05)                            | .12 (.09)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | -.03 (.08)                          |
|                      |                       |                                     | .19* (.09)                          |
|                      |                       |                                     | .02 (.07)                           |
| Age                  | .01* (<.01)            | <.01 (<.01)                          | <.01 (<.01)                         |
|                      |                       |                                     | <.01 (<.01)                         |
|                      |                       |                                     | .01* (<.01)                         |
| Education            | .01 (.03)              | .02 (.03)                            | .05 (.04)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | .03 (.04)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | .05 (.05)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | <.01 (.04)                          |
| Income               | .01 (.01)              | <.01 (.01)                           | .02 (.02)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | .01 (.02)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | .01 (.02)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | .02 (.02)                           |
| Political efficacy   | -.19*** (.04)          | -.21*** (.04)                        | -.23*** (.06)                       |
|                      |                       |                                     | -.24*** (.05)                       |
|                      |                       |                                     | .14* (.06)                          |
|                      |                       |                                     | .11* (.05)                          |
| Political cynicism   | .23*** (.05)           | .19*** (.04)                         | .20*** (.06)                        |
|                      |                       |                                     | .17*** (.06)                        |
|                      |                       |                                     | .20*** (.06)                        |
|                      |                       |                                     | .14*** (.05)                        |
| Political trust      | -.17*** (.05)          | -.12** (.05)                         | -.08 (.07)                          |
|                      |                       |                                     | <.01 (.07)                          |
|                      |                       |                                     | .14 (.07)                           |
|                      |                       |                                     | .14 (.05)                           |
| Main effects         |                        |                                     |                                    |
| Anger                | .12*** (.03)           | .08 (.04)                            | .25*** (.05)                        |
| Sadness              | .15*** (.04)           | .23*** (.05)                         | .07 (.06)                           |
| Emotional expression | .06* (.03)             | .05 (.05)                            | .14*** (.05)                        |
| Interaction effects  |                        |                                     |                                    |
| Anger* expression    | .07* (.03)             | .05 (.05)                            | .01 (.06)                           |
| Sadness* expression  | -.04 (.04)             | .01 (.04)                            | .03 (.06)                           |
| Goodness-of-fit indices |                    |                                     |                                    |
| R²                   | .14                   | .30                                 | .12                                 |
|                      |                       |                                     | .33                                 |
|                      |                       |                                     | .13                                 |
|                      |                       |                                     | .42                                 |
| Adjusted R²          | .13                   | .29                                 | .10                                 |
|                      |                       |                                     | .30                                 |
|                      |                       |                                     | .10                                 |
|                      |                       |                                     | .39                                 |

Note. Unstandardized coefficients entered with standard errors in parentheses. Continuous predictor variables are grand-mean centered when interaction effect terms are created following statistical advice (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2002). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, N = 1,116.
Second, the effect of sadness on the avoidance action tendency hypothesized in H1b was clearly rejected, as the direction of the effect was statistically significantly negative in opponent party supporters (b = -0.21, p < .05), while it was null among independents (b = -0.07, p = n.s.) and incumbent party supporters (b < .01, p = n.s.). Regarding the avoidance action tendency, anger’s positive effect was significant across all three groups (b = .41 for independents, b = .33 for incumbent party supporters, and b = .44 for opponent party supporters, all p’s < .001), contrasting with our expectations. As shown in the results presented in Table 3, H1b failed to receive any empirical support.

Relating to our RQ, emotional expression did not affect the relationship between anger and sadness and the avoidance action tendency, while a main effect from the avoidance action tendency was detected with statistical significance in the three party identification groups.
Table 3

Results of OLS regression models predicting avoidance action tendency

|                          | Independents (n = 591) | Incumbent party supporters (n = 277) | Opponent party supporters (n = 248) |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                          | Model 1                | Model 2                              | Model 1                              |
|                          |                        |                                      | Model 2                              |
| Intercept                | 4.62*** (.48)          | 4.97*** (.43)                        | 1.00 (.76)                           |
|                          |                        |                                      | 1.93** (.69)                         |
|                          |                        |                                      | 3.45*** (.68)                        |
|                          |                        |                                      | 3.76*** (.61)                        |
| Control measures         |                        |                                      |                                     |
| Gender                   | .14 (.09)              | .04 (.08)                            | -.02 (.15)                           |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.20 (.14)                           |
|                          |                        |                                      | .24 (.14)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .07 (.13)                            |
| Age                      | -.02*** (<.01)         | -.02*** (<.01)                       | -.02** (.01)                         |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.02** (.01)                         |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.01 (.01)                           |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.02** (.01)                         |
| Education                | .02 (.04)              | .03 (.04)                            | .10 (.07)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .06 (.06)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .09 (.07)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .04 (.07)                            |
| Income                   | .03 (.02)              | .02 (.02)                            | .02 (.03)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .00 (.03)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .01 (.03)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.00 (.03)                           |
| Political efficacy       | .15* (.07)             | .12 (.06)                            | .38*** (.10)                         |
|                          |                        |                                      | .31*** (.09)                         |
|                          |                        |                                      | .20* (.10)                           |
|                          |                        |                                      | .24** (.09)                          |
| Political cynicism       | -.07 (.07)             | -.09 (.07)                           | .16 (.11)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .13 (.09)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .07 (.10)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .02 (.09)                            |
| Political trust          | -.60*** (.08)          | -.50*** (.07)                        | .07 (.12)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | .10 (.11)                            |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.40*** (.11)                        |
|                          |                        |                                      | -.31*** (.11)                        |
| Main effects             |                        |                                      |                                     |
| Anger                    | .41*** (.05)           | .33*** (.07)                         | .44*** (.09)                         |
| Sadness                  | -.07 (.06)             | .00 (.09)                            | -.21* (.10)                          |
| Emotional expression     | .15** (.05)            | .32*** (.08)                         | .27** (.08)                          |
| Interaction effects      |                        |                                      |                                     |
| Anger* expression        | .02 (.05)              | -.01 (.07)                           | .01 (.09)                            |
| Sadness* expression      | -.00 (.05)             | .08 (.08)                            | .02 (.11)                            |
| Goodness-of-fit indices  |                        |                                      |                                     |
| R²                       | .17                    | .35                                  | .11                                 |
|                          |                        |                                      | .34                                 |
|                          |                        |                                      | .15                                 |
|                          |                        |                                      | .34                                 |
| Adjusted R²              | .16                    | .34                                  | .09                                 |
|                          |                        |                                      | .31                                 |
|                          |                        |                                      | .12                                 |
|                          |                        |                                      | .31                                 |

/ Note. Unstandardized coefficients entered with standard errors in parentheses. Continuous predictor variables are grand-mean centered when interaction effect terms are created following statistical advice (Cohen et al., 2002).

*p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001, N = 1,116
Although the OLS results predicting the voting intention provided in Table 4 are only partial, they provide interesting implications. The results in Table 4 show that people’s approach action tendency was only statistically significant in independent voters ($b = .17, p < .05$), but not in incumbent ($b = .07, p = n.s.$) or opponent party supporters ($b = .10, p = n.s.$), while the avoidance action tendency failed to achieve statistical significance in any of the three groups.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Given that the dependent variable is a four-point scale, ordered logit models may be better than OLS regression models. However, this study relies on OLS models for two reasons. First, use of ordered logit models complicates the interpretation of the mediation effects (i.e., the effects of emotions on voting intention via approach-avoidance action tendency). Second, results of OLS models, which are easier to interpret, are virtually identical with those of ordered logit models. Readers will also find results of the ordered logit models in the Appendix Table.
|                                | Independents (n = 591) | Incumbent party supports (n = 277) | Opponent party supports (n = 248) |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|                                | Model 1                | Model 2                           | Model 1                           | Model 2                           | Model 1                           | Model 2                           |
| Intercept                      | 2.59*** (.51)          | 1.81** (.64)                      | .33 (.72)                         | -.09 (.86)                        | 2.64** (.76)                      | 2.77** (1.01)                     |
| Control measures               |                        |                                   |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Gender                         | -.02 (.10)             | -.03 (.10)                        | .07 (.15)                         | .09 (.15)                         | -.10 (.16)                        | -.09 (.16)                        |
| Age                            | <.01 (<.01)            | <.01 (<.01)                       | .02* (.01)                        | .02* (.01)                        | -.01 (.01)                        | -.01 (.01)                        |
| Education                      | .06 (.04)              | .06 (.04)                         | .05 (.06)                         | .04 (.06)                         | -.05 (.08)                        | -.05 (.08)                        |
| Income                         | .02 (.02)              | .02 (.02)                         | .03 (.03)                         | .03 (.03)                         | .02 (.04)                         | .02 (.04)                         |
| Political efficacy             | -.27*** (.07)          | -.24** (.07)                      | .10 (.09)                         | .09 (.10)                         | -.09 (.11)                        | -.04 (.11)                        |
| Political cynicism             | -.03 (.08)             | -.06 (.08)                        | .01 (.10)                         | -.01 (.10)                        | .05 (.11)                         | .04 (.11)                         |
| Political trust                | -.05 (.08)             | -.03 (.08)                        | <.01 (.11)                        | -.01 (.11)                        | -.12 (.13)                        | -.16 (.13)                        |
| Emotions                       |                        |                                   |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Anger                          | <.01 (.05)             | -.03 (.06)                        | -.08 (.07)                        | -.11 (.08)                        | -.09 (.11)                        | -.05 (.12)                        |
| Sadness                        | .13* (.06)             | .11 (.06)                         | .04 (.08)                         | .03 (.09)                         | .01 (.12)                         | -.02 (.12)                        |
| Emotional expression           | .07 (.06)              | .06 (.06)                         | <.01 (.08)                        | -.03 (.09)                        | .05 (.09)                         | .08 (.10)                         |
| Action tendency                |                        |                                   |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Avoidance                      | .02 (.05)              |                                   |                                   |                                   | .08 (.07)                         | .15 (.08)                         |
| Approach                       | .17* (.07)             |                                   |                                   |                                   | .07 (.11)                         | .10 (.14)                         |
| Goodness-of-fit indices        |                        |                                   |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| R²                             | .06***                 | .07***                            | .04                              | .05                              | .03                              | .04                              |
| Increment R²                   | .01*                   |                                   | .01                              | .01                              | .01                              |                                  |

**Note.** Unstandardized coefficients entered with standard errors in parentheses. Continuous predictor variables are grand-mean centered when interaction effect terms are created following statistical advice (Cohen et al., 2002).

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, N = 1,116
The overall process evidenced by the OLS regression equations implied that there was an indirect effect route, that is, that there were effects from anger and sadness on the voting intention (see results in Table 4) via the approach action tendency (see results in Table 2). Table 5 provides the results of the Sobel test examining the statistical significance of those indirect effects. The results clearly show that two indirect effects were statistically significant: (1) anger’s positive effect (Sobel’s $Z = 2.08$, $p < .05$), and (2) sadness’ positive effect on the voting intention of independents via their approach action tendency (Sobel’s $Z = 2.04$, $p < .05$). The results show that H2a was only supported in independents, while H2b was clearly rejected. Moreover, against our initial expectations, this study detected an indirect effect from sadness on the voting intention via the approach action tendency.

Table 5

\textit{Sobel's test for effects of emotions on voting intention via approach-avoidance action tendency}

|                          | Independents ($n = 591$) | Incumbent party supports ($n = 277$) | Opponent party supports ($n = 248$) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                          | Anger effect | Sadness effect | Anger effect | Sadness effect | Anger effect | Sadness effect | Anger effect | Sadness effect |
| Via                      |              |                |              |                |              |                |              |                |
| Approach action tendency | 2.08*        | 2.04*          | 1.12         | .11            | .71          | .61            |
| Avoidance action tendency | .40          | .40            | .63          | .63            | -1.74        | 1.49           |

$^*$ $p < .05$. Sobel’s $Z$ statistic entered.

**Discussion**

The present study provided both theoretical and empirical support for the varying effects of discrete emotion on the approach-avoidance action tendencies and the voting intention, and the ways emotional expression influences the effects of emotion. Anger provoked an approach action tendency – i.e., a fight-oriented response – in independents and opponent
party supporters, while also eliciting an avoidance action tendency – i.e., a flight-oriented response – with varying effect sizes in the three groups of respondents. Sadness, while still prompting an approach action tendency in independents and incumbent party supporters, was negatively associated with the avoidance action tendency of opponent party supporters. Interestingly, the anger and sadness triggered by the sinking of the ferry promoted the voting intention of political independents by augmenting their approach action tendency; however, the avoidance action tendency failed to mediate the relationship between emotions and the voting intention.

Emotional expression, i.e., the communication of one’s emotions about the tragic accident, positively predicted the approach action tendency of independents and opponent party supporters, while also promoting an avoidance action tendency in all three party identification groups. In independents, emotional expression augmented the positive effect of anger on the approach action tendency.

Building on the theoretical foundation for the varying effects of anger and sadness established by the existing literature, this study aimed to verify whether these two emotions led to certain orientational responses (i.e., approach or avoidance) and, ultimately, to political participation (i.e., voting). Anger, a type of negative emotion that is directed at a certain target (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), was expected to manifest opposing effects to sadness, a negative emotion that tends to blame a vague, impersonal force (Keltner et al., 1993), in the context of a national tragedy such as the Sewol accident. Although the current study evidenced the aggression-provoking nature of anger, its results made it difficult to argue that the two emotions led to opposite behavioral responses.

The possible limitations of this study are as follows. First and foremost, the causality hypothesized in the study may be questionable because the empirical evidence in this study is based on a cross-sectional survey. For example, people’s voting intentions might not be conceptualized as an outcome of approach-avoidance action tendency because it is still possible that people with strong voting intentions might be more likely to take approach
action tendency (i.e. reversed causal order). Additionally, this study does not show empirical evidence whether or not emotions triggered towards the Sewol ferry accident become reduced after expressing one’s emotions. The causality issues which can be legitimately raised in this study should be tested empirically using alternative research methods, such as longitudinal survey and/or experiments.

Second, in defining the approach and avoidance action tendencies, this study assumed an aggressive, fight-related orientation and a passive, flight-related orientation, respectively. However, in most studies distinguishing between approach and avoidance, the two terms were regarded as bipolar motivational systems: the approach orientation was motivated by appetitive factors, whereas the avoidance orientation was prompted by aversive states (e.g., Davidson, 1993; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1990). Following this perspective, the approach action tendency is only associated with positive emotional states. The study rests its theoretical assumption on the slightly different view, echoing that of Adams et al. (2006), that aggression can also act as an influencer in appetitive behavior. That is, although the fight-related orientation has often been regarded as having a negative valence, when applied to certain contexts such as political participation, it can be associated with positively aggressive behaviors, such as voting participation.

Another limitation of this study lay in its measures for the approach and avoidance. Since the two motivational systems are often measured by bodily responses such as the eye gazing response (e.g., Adams et al., 2006) and electroencephalograph (EEG) recordings (e.g., Davidson, Ekman, Saron, Senulis, & Friesen, 1990), the self-reported measure used in the study may not have accurately reflected what is known to stem from brain activities. Rather, this study’s measures were largely context-specific, indicative of what sort of reaction people were willing to take regarding a particular electoral participation. Also it is not completely clear whether respondents’ desire to “leave the country” used in the items of avoidance measure succeeds in representing respondents’ inhibitory action tendency, although the desire prevents them from participating politically. Inasmuch as the two motivational systems have been rarely studied in the realm of social research, new
approach and avoidance measures were created to reflect the common reactions that arose from the Sewol accident. As a crude step, the new measures might have affected the not-so-contrasting results of anger and sadness in our analysis.

Lastly, the context-specificity of the data may have limited the generalizability of the study’s findings. Anger and sadness, although labeled as such, may not always represent identical sets of responses across different events or stimuli: the anger caused by the Sewol accident may have been distinguished from anger arising from other events such as terrorist attacks, and likewise, the sadness aroused by the accident may not have been the same as the sadness one feels about natural disasters. Since the study was intentionally designed to reflect the emotional and behavioral responses aroused by the Sewol accident, the complex nature of this tragic event, e.g., the young victims, corrupt politicians, and accusations against news media, could also have contributed to the effects of distinct emotions on the behavioral intention. More studies are needed to test the effects of discrete emotions in various social events in order to verify the reliability of our findings.

These limitations aside, the extensive theoretical scope and detailed empirical analysis of the study contributed to the integration of emotion, communication, and political studies. Although those were only partially supported in certain party identification groups, the varying effects of two discrete emotions, anger and sadness, on the approach versus avoidance action tendencies, had some critical implications. As anger promoted an approach behavioral intention in independents and opponent party supporters only, incumbent party supporters did not direct their anger towards the government. Rather, their intention to challenge the current governmental system was more influenced by sadness. Despite its commonly-discussed function of promoting aggression, anger also elicited an avoidance orientation in all three groups. The opponent party supporters’ sadness was negatively associated with avoidance, implying that those who were angry against the current government did not tend to translate their sadness into a flight-related response. The varying findings across the groups implied that incumbent party supporters tended to be less influenced by the “new” emotion inflicted by the Sewol
accident due to their strong, preexisting affiliation, whereas in opponent party supporters and independents, the effects of “new” emotion, particularly anger, were amplified and influenced their fight-related response against the current government (in American contexts, see Valentino et al., 2011; Weber, 2013).

This study found that although emotion plays an important role in the political decision-making process, its effects are sometimes overridden or amplified by existing political party affiliation. In those supporting the current government, the intention to challenge the government was only influenced by sadness, not by anger. The intention to escape the situation was, on the other hand, positively affected by anger and emotional expression. Conversely, the opponent party supporters’ fight response against the government was significantly predicted by their anger and emotional expression, but not by sadness. Their intention to flee the country was affected by anger and, although negatively, by sadness. It is worth noting that independents with no party identification were equally affected by anger and sadness in terms of their approach orientation. The approach action tendency, known to be related to aggressive behaviors such as political participation, was found to be a significant predictor of the voting intention only in independent voters without any predisposed party affiliation.

The current study also incorporated the effects of verbal communication on orientational responses and behavioral intentions. Incumbent party supporters, who were less likely to be influenced by their emotional states, displayed relatively little influence from emotion, yet were more greatly influenced by expressive behavior in forming a flight-related response. The expression of one’s emotions significantly predicted the approach action tendency of independents, yet it influenced their voting intention negatively when coupled with anger. As suggested by the prior literature (Pennebaker, 1997), the verbal articulation of emotion can affect perceptual and behavioral responses. In this case, expressing one’s emotions online, just as in a face-to-face setting, contributed to the formation of an avoidance action tendency, possibly because the individuals who “let out” their emotions regarding the event believed these expressive acts to be a form of political
participation, and, consequently, were more frustrated when the situation remained unchanged.

Although some of the results remain open to alternative interpretations, the findings of this study provide emotion scholars with a novel but crude step towards integrating the research on emotion (i.e., anger and sadness), communication studies (i.e., expression), behavioral orientation studies (i.e., approach and avoidance), and political participation. As we are constantly raided by news from around the world, it is important to pay greater attention to the predisposed emotional states of audiences and to the mechanisms linking emotions with certain behaviors. This study highlights the distinction between approach and avoidance, or fight and flight, although there seem to be many other possible theoretical notions linking emotion, expression, and behavior.

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