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# So happy for your loss: Consumer schadenfreude increases choice satisfaction

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## Abstract

Consumers often feel schadenfreude, an emotion reflecting an experience of pleasure over misfortunes of another. Schadenfreude has found wide use in advertising, but its actual consequences for consumers have not been thoroughly documented. The present research investigates the effect of schadenfreude on consumers' satisfaction with choices they have made. Building on the feelings-as-information theory, the authors posit that consumers take their positive feelings of schadenfreude over another's unrelated bad purchase as positive information about their own choices, and through such misattribution become more satisfied with their own choices. Three experiments show that feeling schadenfreude over another consumer's bad purchase makes consumers more satisfied with their own choices (Study 1), regardless of whether the other's bad purchase is in the same or in a different product category as one's own choice (Study 2), but only so long as consumers are not aware that they are engaging in misattribution (Study 3). The present research contributes to the literature on schadenfreude and feelings-as-information theory. Its findings may be used by marketers aiming to exert an unconscious influence on consumer satisfaction.

## KEYWORDS

affect, choice, feelings-as-information, misattribution, misfortune, satisfaction, schadenfreude

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Humans are social animals and maybe evolutionally hard-wired to be especially collaborative (Tomasello, 2014). Should another human face a problem, it should be natural for others to act in compassion, as it would ensure their own survival. Yet, in our modern-day and age, people sometimes feel and express joy rather than sorrow, compassion, or indifference when they learn about the others' misfortunes or misery. In doing so, people experience the emotion of schadenfreude or pleasure in the misfortunes of another (Heider, 1958). Schadenfreude is a response to another's failure (Feather & Sherman, 2002), and is a commonly experienced emotion, facilitated by frequent interpersonal interaction (Li, McAllister, Ilies, & Gloor, 2019) and modern technology (Kim & Kim, 2018).

Consumers experiencing schadenfreude is a fairly common occurrence. For instance, they can experience schadenfreude when they identify with a specific brand and a rival brand fails (Phillips-Melancon & Dalakas, 2014). Comparative ads featuring a failure of an inferior brand may elicit schadenfreude (Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017). Consumers can also feel schadenfreude when another consumer who is higher in social status experiences the failure of a status product s/he owns (Sundie, Ward, Beal, Chin, & Geiger-Oneto, 2009). Not surprisingly, schadenfreude is relied on often in modern-day advertising and direct comparisons between brands are not necessary to elicit it; witnessing somebody else's misfortune may be sufficient (Luckerson, 2014).

Despite its frequent usage in marketing, knowledge about schadenfreude's consequences for consumers is limited. For the most

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part, existing research documents that *schadenfreude* can impact consumer reactions toward brands. For instance, *schadenfreude* from comparative advertising can increase the advertised brand attitude and purchase intention (Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017, 2018). Also, *schadenfreude* from status brand failure can result in negative word-of-mouth and negative affect toward the status brand (Sundie et al., 2009). *Schadenfreude* can also impact how consumers choose: It causes consumers to opt for safe over risky choice options because it heightens the anticipation of unfavorable outcomes (Kramer, Yucel-Aybat, & Lau-Gesk, 2011). Such latter work thus examines the consequences of *schadenfreude* in relation to consumer choices that have yet to be made. However, a significant body of research on feelings-as-information (see Schwarz, 2012 for a review) raises the possibility consumers might misinterpret the other-induced emotion of *schadenfreude* as information about their own already-made, independent choices. Therefore, this study investigates whether, post hoc, *schadenfreude* can influence consumers' evaluation of choices they have already made.

In several experiments, the authors demonstrate that consumers misattribute the positive feelings of *schadenfreude* that they experience from someone else's failed choice to their own choice, becoming more satisfied with it. This happens when the performance of their own purchased item is unknown and is objectively independent of the poor performance of others' failed purchases (Study 1). Further, consumers are more satisfied with their purchases when they feel *schadenfreude* about another's failed purchase even when it is in a completely different product category (Study 2). Finally, reminding consumers that they should not gauge their own success by the failures of others removes the positive influence of *schadenfreude* on choice satisfaction (Study 3).

The current paper makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on the consequences of *schadenfreude* in a consumption context (e.g., Loebnitz & Grunert, 2019; Sundie et al., 2009; Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017). Namely, this study is the first one to demonstrate *schadenfreude* impacts consumers' evaluation of choices they have already made, as reflected in consumer choice satisfaction. Choice satisfaction is critical for companies' efforts to generate loyalty, product recommendations, and positive word-of-mouth (Heitmann, Lehmann, & Herrmann, 2007), and this study proposes that marketing managers can elevate choice satisfaction by harnessing the effects of *schadenfreude*. Importantly, it suggests marketers can garner *schadenfreude* not only through (portrayed) failures involving competing brands or products but also through acceptable portraying of failures of non-competing options or of non-related human targets.

In the rest of the paper, we first review the literature on *schadenfreude* as a consumer emotion and debate how feelings of *schadenfreude* may serve as information about one's own purchase. Hypotheses are presented, and subsequently, three experiments are reported testing them. We close with a discussion of contributions to the literature on *schadenfreude* and feelings-as-information theory, of managerial implications, and respectively of limitations and avenues for future research.

## 2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 | Consumer *schadenfreude*

*Schadenfreude* is a positive emotion of joy over another's misfortune. It is a passive, other-caused emotion (its target is another person), involving perceiver-target incongruence: A person feels joy (positively valenced effect) over discomfort or pain (negative outcomes) of another (Li et al., 2019).

Social comparison theory proposes that people compare their own abilities, achievements, opinions, and possessions with those of others, and use this feedback in self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). *Schadenfreude* may be a response to feelings of inferiority because of prior upward social comparisons (Smith et al., 1996). For example, consumers may see their performance and abilities as inferior compared to others' (Feather, 1989, 1991) or may lack possession of status goods that demonstrate achievement (Sundie et al., 2009). When consumers are feeling inferior to a certain other (i.e., following prior upward social comparison), they may end up engaging in downward social comparison once the certain other has failed in some way. This process may enable them to experience being self-affirmed through feeling *schadenfreude* (van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Wesseling, & van Koningsbruggen, 2011). When consumers deem the certain other personally responsible for that individual's own misfortune, feelings of *schadenfreude* are likely to intensify (van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, & Nieweg, 2005).

Alternatively, consumers may make downward social comparisons and feel *schadenfreude* toward members of a relevant out-group (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003). For example, consumers who identify with Apple may feel *schadenfreude* toward Windows-based PC-users (rival brand) if the latter group's PCs were to fail or had some other problem associated with them (Hickman & Ward, 2007). If a competing out-group actually makes people feel inferior, it will be evaluated even more negatively (Mummendey & Otten, 1998), and the failures of such a group might trigger even greater *schadenfreude* (Leach et al., 2003). Overall, research in psychology and social psychology has identified envy (Feather, 1989, 1991; Smith et al., 1996), trait, or dispositional envy (Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999), resentment (Feather & Sherman, 2002) or anger (Hareli & Weiner, 2002) toward others as precursors of *schadenfreude*.

A number of studies document how *schadenfreude* can be induced in consumption contexts. A consumer lacking a status good (e.g., a luxury car) may feel envy toward another consumer portrayed as possessing the good and would feel *schadenfreude* if the latter consumer's status good develops a problem (Sundie et al., 2009). Consumer identification with a brand can lead to *schadenfreude* toward another rival brand (Phillips-Melancon & Dalakas, 2014), as can brand attachment (Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2018). Consumers express *schadenfreude* when brand copycats emerge, especially when copycats of global rather than of local brands appear (Loebnitz & Grunert, 2019). In televised sports competitions, *schadenfreude* emerges when instant replays show negative outcomes of the opposing team (Kim & Kim, 2018).

Schadenfreude can also be induced by showing brand failure in comparative advertising (cf., Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017, 2018). Marketers appear to be proactively using such a strategy: The “Get a Mac” campaign used a Mac character and an ostensibly Windows-inspired PC character, largely making fun of the latter’s various glitches, for example, physically bloating from “bloatware” programs (Nudd, 2011). By portraying PC failures, the ads were meant to induce schadenfreude and make Mac users feel good. Microsoft responded with ads featuring Apple’s virtual assistant’s (Siri) gushing over all the things she cannot do, compared to Windows’s virtual assistant, Cortana (Aamoth, 2014). More specifically, research shows that comparative advertising elicits schadenfreude particularly when depicting misfortunes of lower-quality (vs. higher-quality) competing brands (Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017), and predominantly for more competitive (vs. less competitive) consumers (Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2018).

In terms of consumer consequences of schadenfreude, existing work mostly focuses on consumer brand reactions. When a status brand fails, schadenfreude causes negative affect, negative attitudes, and stronger intentions to spread negative word-of-mouth about such a brand (Sundie et al., 2009). When copycats of a global brand emerge, schadenfreude increases purchase intentions for such copycats, given consumer intentions to hurt the global brand (Loebnitz & Grunert, 2019). In televised sports competitions, brand attitudes increase for sponsoring brands that advertise during instant replays that show negative outcomes of the opposing team (Kim & Kim, 2018). Schadenfreude elicited by means of comparative advertising leads to higher attitudes, purchase intentions, and willingness-to-pay for the brands being advertised (Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017, 2018).

Schadenfreude can also impact how consumers make choices. In this regard, Kramer et al. (2011) demonstrate that schadenfreude experienced before choice makes consumers more conservative in their choices. They opt for safe over risky options, or average versus extreme options, because schadenfreude signals to consumers that they may themselves experience unfavorable outcomes.

While scholars such as Kramer et al. (2011) start unwrapping the consequences of schadenfreude felt before choice, extant research remains mute regarding the consumer consequences of schadenfreude felt after making a choice. A Mac user may see the “Get a Mac” commercial featuring the newest Windows glitch on their newly purchased Mac. Or they may chance upon an ad that laughs at the high-stakes executives having to fly cheap, along with the common rabble (Garfield, 2009). In either case, they would still feel schadenfreude toward another and are likely to like the ads (Kim & Kim, 2018; Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017), while their choice and purchase of the Mac has already occurred. Will they feel any different about their Mac purchase if they feel schadenfreude following such purchase? Despite the widespread nature of schadenfreude in marketing campaigns, the evidence that schadenfreude may affect consumers’ evaluation of choices (and purchases) they have already made is lacking. The conceptual development below addresses the possibility that incidental schadenfreude may affect one’s evaluation of their already-made choices.

## 2.2 | Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

The conceptual framework is informed by the feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012; Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Failures of others help consumers enjoy themselves but should not be related to judgments of one’s own decisions, as the source of positive feelings of schadenfreude is external to one’s choice. Yet, people often base their judgments on their feelings, for example, they report being more satisfied with their lives on sunny days (Schwarz & Clore, 1983) or report higher subjective well-being after thinking of positive events they experienced (Strack, Schwarz, & Gschneidinger, 1985). The feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012) posits that this happens due to the misattribution of feelings from a different source to the target under evaluation. When engaged in misattribution, people do not perform conscious attribution of feelings to targets, but rather automatically determine that their feelings must be “about” the evaluated target (Higgins, 1998). For instance, people misjudge both their overall mood (Hirschleifer & Shumway, 2003) and specific emotions (Schwarz, Servay, & Kumpf, 1985) as diagnostic of targets they evaluate. Misattribution is automatic, as confirmed by the fact that people are more likely to rely on their feelings in making judgments if they lack the motivation (Rothman & Schwarz, 1998) or the ability (Siemer & Reisenzein, 1998) to scrutinize the reasoning for their judgments.

Based on the feelings-as-information account (Schwarz, 2012), consumers should take the overall positive effect from (unrelated) schadenfreude as information about a choice they have made. Research elsewhere (e.g., Ehrlich, Guttman, Schönbach, & Mills, 1957; Festinger, 1957; Frey, 1981) supports the idea that consumers often seek out positive information about a chosen option to reassure themselves that they have made good choice. Finding positive information about the chosen option should make consumers more satisfied with the choice they have made (Festinger, 1964). Given their urge to bolster the evaluation of a chosen alternative after purchase, consumers are likely to attend to the positive feelings of schadenfreude, which they misattribute to the outcome of their own choice. Thus, after a choice (and purchase) consumers will integrate unrelated positive feelings of schadenfreude as positive “information” about their own choices, thereby increasing their choice satisfaction. In summary:

**H1:** *Feelings of schadenfreude over another’s misfortune after choice will make consumers more satisfied with their own choices.*

It is important to delineate this effect from somewhat similar effects. Specifically, misattributing schadenfreude to a choice is not the same as using feedback about a worse-performing option in choice evaluation. Consumers will integrate the feeling of elation over their choice in its evaluation if they know that their chosen option is superior to a foregone alternative (Inman, Dyer, & Jia, 1997). Regret and elation are important determinants of satisfaction (Ritov, 2006), but schadenfreude in itself does not provide any feedback about

one's own chosen option. Schadenfreude can be derived from a comparative ad involving competing options (Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017), but it can also be felt when someone high in social status makes a poor purchase in any category (Sundie et al., 2009). The latter situation would not involve feedback on an alternative that consumer forwent when making their choice in a focal category. Accordingly, the effect hypothesized in H1 should still occur when another's misfortune does not involve a direct competing option to a consumer's choice. In their work, Yucel-Aybat and Kramer (2017) propose that schadenfreude stemming from comparative advertising may increase liking and purchase intentions for a brand when this brand is compared to an inferior (but not superior) brand that fails. More generally, this study proposes that the direct comparison between competing brands or choice options is not necessary for consumers to feel schadenfreude.

It follows that, as the effect hypothesized in H1 is due to the misattribution of positive feelings over another's misfortunes to one's own choice, it should be possible for consumers to feel more satisfied with a choice even when another's failure that triggers schadenfreude is in a different product category. Therefore, the impact of consumer schadenfreude on choice satisfaction should hold when another's failed purchase is in a different category from that involved in the choice. Formally:

**H2:** *Consumers will be more satisfied with their own choices because of feelings of schadenfreude over another's failed purchase even if this failed purchase is in a different product category.*

The core effect hypothesized in H1 is likely subject to boundary conditions. In the current context, misattribution involves incorrect attribution of feelings to an unrelated event. As such, it should follow the rules of causal attribution specified by the attributional theory (Weiner, 1985). Specifically, in finding a cause for an event, consumers should follow the rule of causal priority that an event can only be caused by something that temporally preceded it, but not by something that temporally followed it, a principle people understand from an early age (Shultz, Altmann, & Asselin, 1986). Indeed, people may use the rule of temporal order (cause precedes effect) to judge causality of events unconsciously, without explicit awareness of its usage (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1986). It can therefore be expected that consumers would misattribute their unrelated positive feelings of schadenfreude to their own "good" choice when feelings of schadenfreude are experienced after, but not before their choice. Therefore, the focal effect in H1 would depend on the time of schadenfreude onset (i.e., before vs. after choice):

**H3:** *The positive effect of feelings of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction will only occur when schadenfreude follows choice, but not when it precedes it.*

Another important question is whether the misattribution of positive feelings of schadenfreude to one's own choices could be corrected. The process of misattribution is automatic and happens

unconsciously, outside of people's awareness (Bargh, 1994; Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005). The effects of unconscious misattribution of feelings to causes can be successfully corrected by individuals if the informational value of such feelings is called into question (Schwarz, 2012). For example, consumers normally evaluate new products more favorably when induced to be in a positive (vs. negative) mood by music (Gorn, 1982). If they become aware that music was the source of their mood, this effect disappears (Gorn, Goldberg, & Basu, 1993). Accordingly, to correct their misattribution, consumers would have to deliberately think over the source of their effect and recognize that their judgment has been largely driven by unrelated feelings. Engaging in misattribution and correcting for it can therefore be seen as a dual process: the former is automatic and unconscious, and the latter is conscious, slow, deliberative, and used to intervene into the automatic operation of the former (for a review, see Evans, 2008).

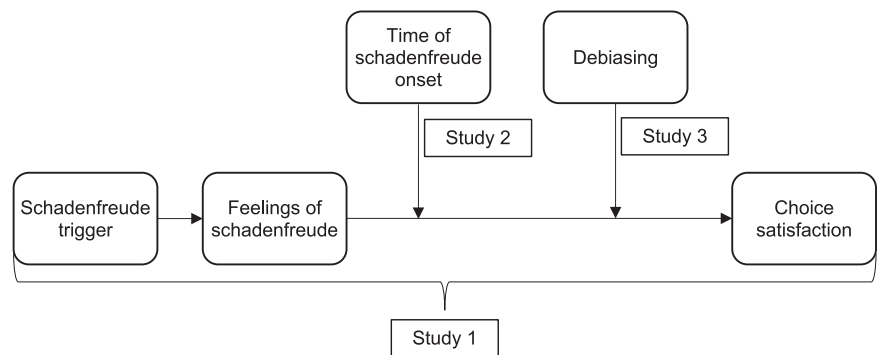
Therefore, consumers can be made aware about their misattribution of feelings of schadenfreude from another source (i.e., witnessing another's failure) to their own choice, thus being in effect "debiased" (cf., Gorn et al., 1993). If consumers were "debiased," they should compensate for their misattribution, thus refraining from boosting the evaluation of a choice they have made (Wilson & Brekke, 1994). Suggesting to consumers that they might be engaging in the misattribution of unrelated feelings should not prevent them from feeling schadenfreude, but should prevent them from integrating feelings of schadenfreude into the evaluation of their own unrelated choices. Overall:

**H4:** *Debiasing (not debiasing) consumers regarding the misattribution of feelings of schadenfreude will erase (maintain) the positive effect of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction.*

Three experimental studies test the hypotheses, as indicated in the conceptual model below (see Figure 1). In each of the studies, we elicit feelings of schadenfreude using "schadenfreude triggers": Another's failed purchase in the same category (Studies 1, 2, and 3) or in a different category (Study 2) from that in which study participants are requested to make a choice.

## 2.3 | Overview of the studies

Overall, Study 1 tests H1 and establishes the positive effect of feelings of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction; it also shows that the effect occurs even controlling for the influence of known antecedents of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction. Subsequent studies demonstrate boundary conditions to H1. Study 2 tests H3 and shows that feelings of schadenfreude influence choice satisfaction only when they follow a choice, but not when they precede it. Moreover, it tests H2 and shows that the effect observed in Study 1 occurs even when schadenfreude is felt about someone's failed purchase in a completely different product category. Thus, Study 2 rules out the explanation that consumers are simply satisfied with their choices

**FIGURE 1** Conceptual model

because a foregone competing choice option performed badly. Study 3 tests H4 and demonstrates how the automatic process of misattributing unrelated positive feelings of schadenfreude to one's own choice can be prevented via debiasing.

### 3 | STUDY 1

#### 3.1 | Method

Study 1 aimed to explore whether feeling schadenfreude over someone's consumption misfortune influences choice satisfaction. The study was a single-factor experiment, with two conditions of schadenfreude trigger: no schadenfreude; schadenfreude. Sixty panelists (56.7% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 33.17$ ,  $SD = 9.58$ ) located in the United States recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk completed the study in exchange for \$1. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Participants were asked to choose one of two wines (priced at the same level) sold by an online retailer. Before making a choice, participants read a vignette about a woman named Caroline, aged 22, who recently bought a pair of shoes. In the no-schadenfreude condition, Caroline bought a pair of Zara shoes for \$50 to replace her last pair. In the schadenfreude condition, Caroline purchased Christian Louboutin shoes for \$4,000 to show off at her engagement party. Subsequent to participants' choice of wine, they learned that Caroline bought the other wine (the competing option) and hated it, leaving an online review saying that it "tasted awful" and "ruined her dinner." Therefore, in the no-schadenfreude condition, Caroline bought inexpensive shoes and was later revealed to have bought the wine that a participant did not choose and which she was described to be unhappy with. In the schadenfreude condition, Caroline bought expensive shoes and was similarly revealed to have bought the wine that a participant did not choose and which she was described to be unhappy with. This study therefore adopted the schadenfreude manipulation of Sundie et al. (2009), who used an expensive purchase to convey high social status of a person and proved that consumers would feel more schadenfreude should such a person's purchase fail.

After learning about Caroline's purchase troubles, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with their own wine choice, using three items: "How satisfied are you with the wine choice that you made?", "How good or bad do you feel about the wine choice that

you made?", both measured on 1 (*very dissatisfied/very bad*) to 7 (*very satisfied/very good*) scales, and "How much do you regret the wine choice that you made?" measured on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) scale, subsequently reverse-coded.

Subsequently, positive feelings of schadenfreude (joy, happiness, satisfaction, and gladness) that participants felt vis-a-vis Caroline's purchase trouble (Sundie et al., 2009) were measured (e.g., "How happy are you about Caroline's wine purchase trouble?" 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*)). The study then measured participants' feelings which are known to be antecedents of schadenfreude: jealousy, envy, anger toward Caroline's life in general, injustice over Caroline's life, and resentment of Caroline on seven-point Likert-type scales (e.g., "How much do you resent Caroline?" 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*)). Finally, two covariates were elicited: participants' interest in wine shopping ("I am really interested in shopping for wine") and personal relevance of shopping for wine to them ("Shopping for wine is something I might personally do"), measured on a Likert-type scale, anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

#### 3.2 | Results

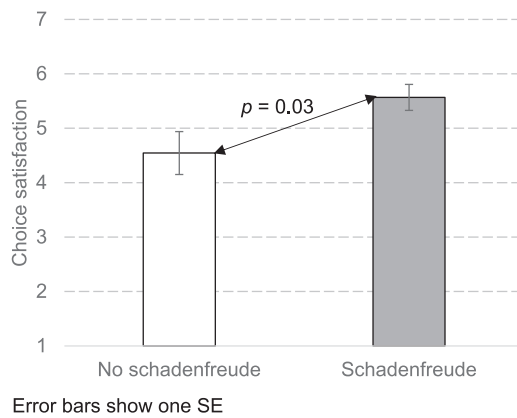
##### 3.2.1 | Feelings of schadenfreude

The four items used to capture the feelings of schadenfreude showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .98$ ) and were averaged into a single index. Participants in the schadenfreude condition reported significantly stronger feelings ( $M_{\text{schad}} = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ) than participants in the no-schadenfreude condition ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ,  $t(58) = 5.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.37$ ).

##### 3.2.2 | Choice satisfaction

The three choice satisfaction items also showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and were averaged into a single choice satisfaction index. Participants in the schadenfreude condition were more satisfied with their choice of wine ( $M_{\text{schad}} = 5.57$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) than participants in the no-schadenfreude condition ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ,  $t(58) = 2.22$ ,  $p = .03$ , Cohen's  $d = .57$ ; see Figure 2).





**FIGURE 2** Choice satisfaction across conditions, Study 1

The effect of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction held even after controlling for the (nonsignificant) influence of known antecedents of schadenfreude: participants' resentment of Caroline and their feelings of anger, jealousy, envy, and injustice over Caroline's life. Additionally, neither participants' interest in shopping for wine ( $F(1, 56) = 0.01$ ,  $p > .91$ ), nor the personal relevance of shopping for wine to them ( $F(1, 56) = 0.47$ ,  $p > .49$ ) influenced choice satisfaction.

Furthermore, mediation analysis with 5,000 bootstrap resamples (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010) showed that the positive feelings of schadenfreude fully mediated the effect of schadenfreude trigger on choice satisfaction (indirect effect  $b = 0.5$ , 95% CI: [0.01, 1.22]). Controlling for feelings of schadenfreude, the direct effect of schadenfreude trigger on choice satisfaction was not significant ( $p > .35$ ).

Study 1 also ruled out the alternative explanation that envy or jealousy toward someone of higher social status made the item they had not chosen more desirable (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011). Envy did not mediate the relationship between the manipulation of schadenfreude trigger and choice satisfaction (indirect effect  $b = -0.17$ , 95% CI: [-0.48, 0.06]), and neither did jealousy (indirect effect  $b = -0.2$ , 95% CI: [-0.55, 0.03]).

### 3.3 | Discussion

Overall, the findings of Study 1 support H1. After schadenfreude was triggered, participants likely misattributed their positive feelings of schadenfreude over another's bad purchase to their own "good" choice, becoming more satisfied with it. This occurred despite the fact that such feelings should objectively provide no feedback about how good participants' own chosen option was. This effect held controlling for known antecedents of schadenfreude, and it occurred because schadenfreude participants were happy about Caroline's purchase failure. While Study 1 shows that feelings of schadenfreude are misattributed to own choice, one may argue that the effect occurs only when another chooses a foregone same-category competing option that fails. Study 2 rules out this explanation.

## 4 | STUDY 2

### 4.1 | Method

Study 2 intended to test whether information about the failure of any purchase made by another—even one in a completely different category—could make participants experience feelings of schadenfreude and subsequently feel better about their choices. Study 2 also tested whether the attribution of feelings of schadenfreude to choice will materialize when a choice temporally followed (rather than temporally preceded) the onset of schadenfreude.

Study 2 employed a 3 (schadenfreude trigger: no schadenfreude, same-category schadenfreude, different-category schadenfreude)  $\times$  2 (time of schadenfreude onset: before choice, after choice) full-factorial design. Three hundred and fifty-nine participants (64.1% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.32$ ,  $SD = 10.86$ ) located in the United States recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk completed this study in exchange for \$0.50. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions. The first two levels of the "schadenfreude trigger" factor (no schadenfreude, same-category schadenfreude) were the same as in Study 1. For the third level (different-category schadenfreude), Caroline expressed her disappointment with the expensive shoes she bought while no wine purchase of Caroline was not mentioned at all. Thus, in the different-category schadenfreude case, Caroline's status product (i.e., expensive shoes) failed (see Appendix A for an overview of the experimental procedures used in Study 2).

Regarding the "time of schadenfreude onset" factor, procedures in the schadenfreude-after-choice condition were similar to those in Study 1. The same opening vignette was used (informing participants about Caroline's purchase of inexpensive shoes in the no-schadenfreude condition and of expensive shoes in the same-category schadenfreude and different-category schadenfreude conditions). Participants then chose from the same wines and, in the no-schadenfreude and the same-category schadenfreude conditions, were shown the same information about Caroline's bad wine purchase as in Study 1; however, in the different-category schadenfreude condition, Caroline expressed her disappointment with the expensive shoes she bought (rather than with a wine). Following the schadenfreude trigger manipulation, participants in the schadenfreude-after-choice condition answered the choice satisfaction questions ("How satisfied are you with the wine choice that you made?" and "How good or bad do you feel about the wine choice that you made?", both measured on 1 (*very dissatisfied/very bad*) to 7 (*very satisfied/very good*) scales). Subsequently, positive feelings of schadenfreude (joy, happiness, satisfaction, and gladness) that participants felt vis-a-vis Caroline's purchase trouble (Sundie et al., 2009) were measured (e.g., "How happy are you about Caroline's wine purchase trouble?", 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*)); those in a "different-category schadenfreude" condition were asked how they felt about Caroline's shoe, rather than wine, purchase trouble. Lastly, the same covariates as in Study 1 were administered: personal relevance of wine shopping to participants and their interest in wine.

To manipulate *schadenfreude*-before-choice, participants first read the same opening vignette as in Study 1 (telling participants about Caroline's purchase of inexpensive shoes in the no-*schadenfreude* condition, and respectively of expensive shoes in the same-category *schadenfreude* and different-category *schadenfreude* conditions) and then immediately learned that Caroline's purchase of either wine (no-*schadenfreude* and same-category *schadenfreude* conditions) or shoes (different-category *schadenfreude*) went awry. For the no-*schadenfreude* and same-category *schadenfreude* conditions, a slightly different wine to those participants subsequently chose from was presented to have been bought by Caroline; however, this wine was similar enough to the options in the choice set, so that study participants' subsequent choice did not become trivial (i.e., simply not choosing the precise same wine that Caroline failed with). Meanwhile, in the different-category *schadenfreude* condition, no wine purchase of Caroline was mentioned at all. Following this, participants rated their positive feelings of *schadenfreude* and proceeded to make a wine choice. Subsequently, the dependent variables were taken as in the *schadenfreude*-after-choice condition, and participants responded to the same covariates.

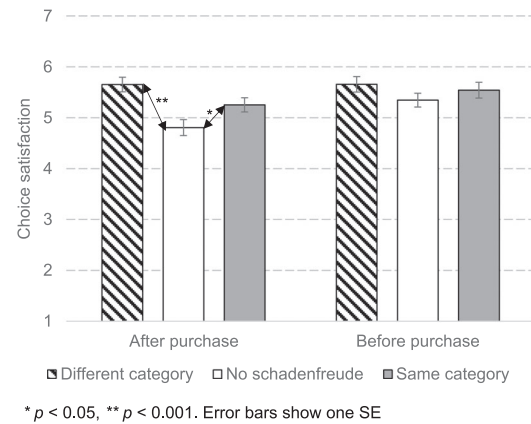
## 4.2 | Results

### 4.2.1 | Feelings of *schadenfreude*

The four items used to capture *schadenfreude* showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .97$  for same-category purchases and  $.96$  for different-category purchases) and were averaged into a single feeling of *schadenfreude* index. This index was influenced by the *schadenfreude* trigger manipulation ( $F(2, 353) = 11.39, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ), but not the time of onset manipulation ( $F(1, 353) = 0.91, p > .34$ ) nor their interaction ( $F(2, 353) = 2.11, p > .12$ ). Planned contrasts revealed that, as expected, participants in the no-*schadenfreude* condition felt less *schadenfreude* ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 3.12, SD = 2.06$ ) than participants in the same-category *schadenfreude* ( $M_{\text{same-schad}} = 4.12, SD = 1.81, F(1, 353) = 13.31, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ) and different-category *schadenfreude* conditions ( $M_{\text{diff-schad}} = 4.29, SD = 2.02, F(1, 353) = 20.09, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ ). Also, there was no statistically significant difference in feelings of *schadenfreude* from Caroline's bad same-category purchase and from a bad purchase in a different category ( $F(1, 353) = 0.69, p = .41$ ).

### 4.2.2 | Choice satisfaction

The two choice satisfaction measures showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .85$ ) so their average was used in the analysis. A  $3 \times 2$  analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of *schadenfreude* trigger and time of onset on choice satisfaction with both covariates revealed that both interest in wine ( $F(1, 351) = 16.42, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ) and personal relevance of shopping for wine to participants ( $F(1, 351) = 3.83, p = .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ) influenced choice



**FIGURE 3** Choice satisfaction across conditions, Study 2

satisfaction. As the personal relevance of the experimental task and the interest in the stimulus category influenced the outcome variable, the results of ANCOVA analysis controlling for these confounds will be reported. Please consult Figure 3 for the graphical representation of results.

A  $3 \times 2$  ANCOVA of *schadenfreude* trigger and time of onset on choice satisfaction with personal relevance of wine shopping and interest in wine as covariates showed a significant effect of *schadenfreude* trigger ( $F(2, 351) = 6.84, p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ), a significant effect of time of onset manipulation ( $F(1, 351) = 5.33, p = .02$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ) and an interaction that did not reach significance ( $F(2, 351) = 1.63, p = .2$ ). Main effect contrasts showed that participants in the no-*schadenfreude* condition were overall less satisfied with their choice ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 5.09, SE = 0.1$ ) than participants in the same-category *schadenfreude* condition ( $M_{\text{same-schad}} = 5.40, SE = 0.1, F(1, 351) = 4.62, p = .03$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ) and in the different-category *schadenfreude* condition ( $M_{\text{diff-schad}} = 5.63, SE = 0.1, F(1, 351) = 13.54, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ). There was no statistically significant difference in choice satisfaction between the same-category and different-category *schadenfreude* conditions ( $F(1, 351) = 2.4, p > .12$ ).

Planned contrasts showed that when Caroline's purchase troubles were revealed after participants made a choice of wine, participants in the no-*schadenfreude* condition were less satisfied with their choice ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 4.82, SE = 0.16$ ) than participants who felt *schadenfreude* because of Caroline's failed purchase in the same product category ( $M_{\text{same-schad}} = 5.25, SE = 0.14, F(1, 351) = 4.23, p = .04$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ) and in a different product category ( $M_{\text{diff-schad}} = 5.63, SE = 0.14, F(1, 351) = 14.45, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ). There was also a difference in the level of choice satisfaction between the same-category and different-category *schadenfreude* trigger conditions ( $F(1, 351) = 3.6, p = .06$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ). While not contradicting the hypotheses, this difference serves to further strengthen the point that the effect of *schadenfreude* on choice satisfaction is not just produced because of Caroline's choosing a competing option (as Study 1 results might suggest); in the current Study 2, feeling *schadenfreude* after choosing from a different product category than Caroline made participants even slightly more satisfied than after choosing from the same category.



When participants learned about Caroline's purchase troubles before making a choice, there was no statistically significant difference in the level of choice satisfaction between the no-schadenfreude ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 5.35$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ) and the other two schadenfreude trigger conditions ( $M_{\text{same-schad}} = 5.55$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $F(1, 351) = 0.93$ ,  $p > .33$ ;  $M_{\text{diff-schad}} = 5.63$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $F(1, 351) = 1.85$ ,  $p > .17$ ). There was also no statistically significant difference in the level of choice satisfaction between the same-category and different-category schadenfreude trigger conditions ( $F(1, 351) = 0.13$ ,  $p > .71$ ).

Further, we ran a 5,000 bootstrap resamples moderated mediation model of the impact of schadenfreude trigger (via feelings of schadenfreude) and time of onset on choice satisfaction, with the two covariates. Time of onset changes whether consumers attribute their positive feelings of schadenfreude to their choice, but not how much schadenfreude consumers feel. This corresponds to model 14 in Hayes (2013), where the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable is moderated, in line with the conceptual model (Figure 1). We used indicator coding for the multicategorical predictor variable (schadenfreude trigger), with the no-schadenfreude condition as the reference group (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). The results show that when schadenfreude is triggered after choice, feelings of schadenfreude mediate the positive differences in choice satisfaction between both same-category and no-schadenfreude conditions ( $b = 0.14$ , 95% CI: [0.03, 0.3]) and different-category and no-schadenfreude conditions ( $b = 0.16$ , 95% CI: [0.04, 0.33]). When schadenfreude is felt before choice, however, there is no mediation of differences in choice satisfaction between either same-category and no-schadenfreude conditions ( $b = 0.04$ , 95% CI: [-0.03, 0.13]) or different-category and no-schadenfreude conditions ( $b = 0.04$ , 95% CI: [-0.04, 0.14]). Figure 4 below demonstrates these results graphically. These results are consistent with the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1.

### 4.3 | Discussion

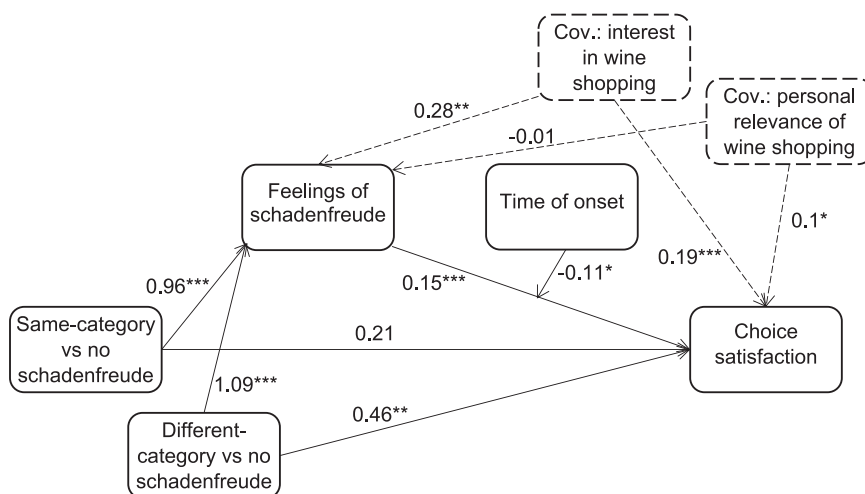
Study 2 demonstrated that, whether Caroline's bad purchase was in the same or in a different category as theirs, participants

misattributed their positive feelings of schadenfreude to their choice and felt more satisfied with it. This finding confirms H2. Since participants in the different-category schadenfreude condition did not know whether Caroline made a choice of wine at all, this also rules out an explanation that participants in the schadenfreude condition in Study 1 (same-category schadenfreude in Study 2) were satisfied simply because they chose an option that Caroline did not choose. Rather, they were satisfied because they felt schadenfreude as Caroline had a failed purchase. Study 2 also confirms H3 and identifies a boundary condition for the effect of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction: this effect does not occur if participants feel schadenfreude before making their own choice.

## 5 | STUDY 3

### 5.1 | Method

Study 3 tested the notion that consumers can be induced to not misattribute their feelings of schadenfreude to their own choices, which should erase the effect of schadenfreude on choice satisfaction. Study 3 employed a 2 (schadenfreude trigger: schadenfreude, no schadenfreude)  $\times$  2 (debiasing: participants debiased or not debiased) factorial design. One hundred and eighteen respondents (61% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 32.8$ ,  $SD = 10.03$ ) located in the United States were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk and completed the study for \$1. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. The study was purported to be a series of unrelated tasks. The schadenfreude trigger manipulation was identical to Study 1; however, in Study 3, participants made a choice of earphones (rather than of wine, as in Studies 1 and 2). Participants first read the shoe-purchase vignette about Caroline (used for schadenfreude trigger), and then made a choice of a pair of earphones that they would like to buy out of the two on offer and priced at the same level. Subsequently, and similarly to the Study 1 procedure, participants learned that Caroline bought the other pair of earphones and hated it, leaving an online review that called them



\*  $p < 0.07$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**FIGURE 4** Results of moderated mediation testing, Study 2

"flimsy," pointed out bad sound quality and said that her "entertainment was ruined." Immediately after this, participants' feelings of schadenfreude were measured. This was done before participants could be debiased, as doing otherwise would have unduly influenced the feelings of schadenfreude score.

Next, participants read an ostensibly unrelated vignette about extreme weather events in the United States (non-debiasing condition) or about social media reports of others' failed relationships, unduly boosting one's judgments of their own relationship (debiasing condition). The information in the non-debiasing condition was thus neutral and unrelated to the experimental task. The information in the debiasing condition was meant to make participants aware of the process of misattribution (i.e., of others' failures to one's own situation). We expected this to subsequently prevent participants from misattributing positive feelings of schadenfreude to their own choices. Our debiasing procedure is parallel to that used in other academic work (e.g., Billeter, Kalra, & Loewenstein, 2011; Gorn et al., 1993). Both vignettes were equal in length. In addition, participants answered whether they thought the vignette came from a newspaper before proceeding to a "different" task, which asked them to rate their (earphone) choice satisfaction and to score covariates, parallel to the procedure in Study 2.

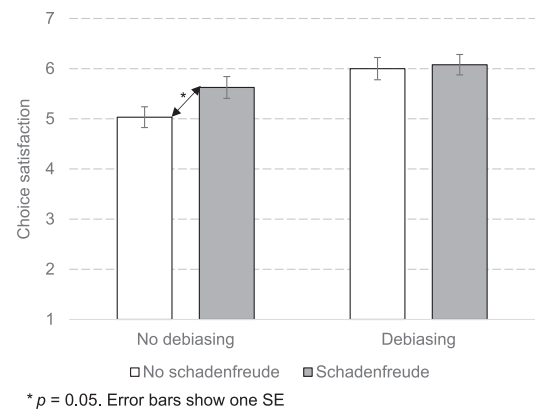
## 5.2 | Results

### 5.2.1 | Feelings of schadenfreude

The four feelings of schadenfreude items showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .97$ ) so their average was used in the analysis. A  $2 \times 2$  analysis of variance (ANOVA) of schadenfreude trigger and debiasing on feelings of schadenfreude score showed a significant main effect of schadenfreude trigger ( $F(1, 114) = 19.61, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.15$ ), but no significant effect of debiasing ( $F(1, 114) = 0.02, p > .89$ ) or of the factor interaction ( $F(1, 114) = 0.05, p = .82$ ). As expected, participants in the schadenfreude condition experienced stronger feelings of schadenfreude ( $M_{\text{schad}} = 3.22, SD = 1.96$ ) than participants in the no-schadenfreude condition ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 1.87, SD = 1.21$ ).

### 5.2.2 | Choice satisfaction

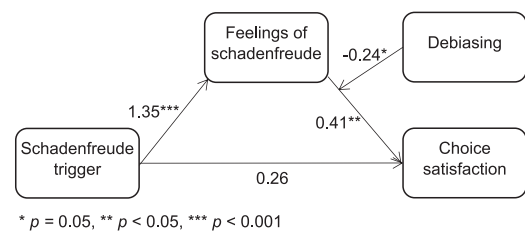
The items used to measure choice satisfaction showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and were averaged into a single score. A  $2 \times 2$  ANOVA of schadenfreude trigger and debiasing on choice satisfaction showed a significant main effect of debiasing ( $F(1, 114) = 11.16, p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.09$ ), no significant main effect of schadenfreude trigger ( $F(1, 114) = 2.49, p = .12$ ) and an interaction that did not reach significance ( $F(1, 114) = 1.46, p = .23$ ). Planned contrasts revealed that when participants read an unrelated story about weather patterns, they felt more satisfied with their choice of earphones if they were in the schadenfreude condition ( $M_{\text{schad}} = 5.63, SD = 1.32$ ) than if they were in the no-schadenfreude condition ( $M_{\text{no-schad}} = 5.03$ ,



**FIGURE 5** Choice satisfaction across conditions, Study 3

$SD = 1.3, F(1, 114) = 3.89, p = .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ). Such difference was not statistically significant if participants were debiased ( $M_{\text{schad}} = 6.08, SD = 0.96; M_{\text{no-schad}} = 6, SD = 0.97, F(1, 114) = 0.07, p = .8$ ). Interest in shopping for earphones and personal relevance of shopping for earphones to participants did not influence choice satisfaction. Please see Figure 5 for the graphical representation of these results.

Further, we ran a moderation model (Model 1 in Hayes, 2013) of the influence of feelings of schadenfreude (IV) and debiasing (moderator) on choice satisfaction. The model showed significant main effects of feelings of schadenfreude ( $b = 0.44, t(114) = 2.31, p = .02$ ), of debiasing ( $b = 1.33, t(114) = 3.58, p < .001$ ) and a significant interaction effect ( $b = -0.24, t(114) = -1.99, p < .05$ ). In line with previous studies, feelings of schadenfreude significantly and positively affected choice satisfaction for non-debiased participants ( $b = 0.2, t(114) = 2.36, p = .02$ ), but not for participants who were debiased ( $b = -0.04, t(114) = -0.46, p = .65$ ). This result is congruent with our conceptual model outlined in Figure 1. Additionally, we ran a moderated mediation model with 5,000 bootstrap resamples, using Model 14 in Hayes (2013), where the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable is moderated, in line with the conceptual model (Figure 1). As covariates (i.e., interest in shopping for earphones and personal relevance of shopping for earphones) did not influence choice satisfaction, they were not included in the tested model specification. Feelings of schadenfreude mediated the effect of schadenfreude trigger on choice satisfaction when participants were not debiased ( $b = 0.23, 90\% \text{ CI: } [0.03, 0.5]$ ). There was no such mediation when participants were debiased ( $b = -0.09, 90\% \text{ CI: } [-0.3, 0.06]$ ). Figure 6 below demonstrates these results graphically.



**FIGURE 6** Results of moderated mediation testing, Study 3

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that when participants were made aware of misattribution, they did not misattribute their positive feelings of *schadenfreude* to their own “good” choices, which they would have done had they not been debiased.

### 5.3 | Discussion

Besides supporting H4, Study 3 accomplished several other goals. First, it replicated the results of Studies 1 and 2 regarding the misattribution of feelings of *schadenfreude* to choice satisfaction. Second, it extended the first two studies by exploring the situation when consumers are made aware that they may be committing misattribution. Findings suggest that, under such circumstances, they become no more satisfied with their choices than consumers who feel no *schadenfreude*. Thus, consumers can be educated not to misattribute feelings of *schadenfreude* to judgments of their own choices.

## 6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

### 6.1 | Theoretical contributions

Social norms often demand a sympathetic response to another's misfortune. *Schadenfreude* however runs counter to this expectation, being a feeling of pleasure over another's misfortune. In that sense, it is a peculiar and complex emotion and some may even view it as socially reprehensible (Kramer et al., 2011).

At an abstract level, our research contributes to the literature on the consequences of complex emotions (Kramer, Lau-Gesk, & Chiu, 2009; Williams & Aaker, 2002). More specifically, it extends the emerging scholarship on some of the outcomes of consumer *schadenfreude* (Kramer et al., 2011; Loebnitz & Grunert, 2019; Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017). Informed by the feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012; Schwarz & Clore, 2007), the current work reveals a surprising finding across three empirical studies—that witnessing another's failed purchase can make consumers feel better about their own choice, even though another's failure should rationally not impact the evaluation of one's own choice. Although consumers should be expected to recognize the source of their positive feelings (i.e., another's failure) and separate it from unrelated judgments, they seem to not be very adept at doing so.

Kramer et al. (2011) show that *schadenfreude* felt before a choice makes consumers more conservative in their choice. We show that after making a choice, *schadenfreude* might actually make consumers less conservative in evaluating their choice. These findings in aggregate may not be as contrasting as they appear. Kramer et al. (2011) examined the effect of *schadenfreude* before making a choice while we investigate its effect after making a choice. The dependent variables in the studies are also different: Kramer et al. (2011) are interested in risky versus safe choices while we are interested in choice satisfaction. In aggregate, these two inquiries enrich our

understanding of the consequences of *schadenfreude* before and after choice by looking at different outcome variables.

Furthermore, this study extends the findings of Yucel-Aybat and Kramer (2017, 2018), namely that *schadenfreude* stemming from comparative advertising may increase liking for an advertised brand. Our research shows that direct comparison between brands or choice options is not necessary to trigger *schadenfreude*, nor does the actual performance of the chosen option need to be known to increase the evaluation of one's choice. Therefore, consumers will mistake positive feelings of *schadenfreude* as information about their own choice when they have no reason to believe that their chosen product is superior than someone else's failed product. This effect is also not driven by feelings of envy or jealousy toward another (Study 1). Study 2 shows that such misattribution is robust across categories, even where the unsatisfactory performance of another's purchased product cannot be compared to the performance of one's chosen item.

This study also adds to the literature on appraisal of emotions (Lazarus, 1991; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Li et al., 2019; Morales, Wu, & Fitzsimons, 2012; Roseman & Smith, 2001; van Dijk et al., 2011). *Schadenfreude* occurs when people are concerned with the goal of maintaining self- and social-esteem (Li et al., 2019; van Dijk et al., 2011). However, as the target of *schadenfreude* is another person, it can be appraised in terms of a specific appraisal dimension (theme) of certainty/uncertainty (Lerner & Keltner, 2000), leading to avoidance of uncertainty in choices (Kramer et al., 2011). This study, however, shows that overall pleasantness (positivity) of *schadenfreude*, another appraisal dimension, is used in judgments of one's own unrelated previous choices. Thus, drawing on the effect of the valence of the emotions, the present research contributes to the feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012) by identifying the specific, other-caused emotion of *schadenfreude* that may be misconstrued as information about one's own (not the other's) unrelated choices. Study 3 underscores the automaticity of such misattribution (the effect disappears when consumers become aware of possible misattribution) and Study 2 indicates that temporal precedence is necessary for this misattribution to occur.

### 6.2 | Managerial implications

Marketing communications practitioners and brand managers, in particular, may find our investigation to be of interest. *Schadenfreude* has found extensive use in advertising (Garfield, 2009; Luckerson, 2014; Nudd, 2011), and the present research explains why *schadenfreude* can enhance consumers' satisfaction with their already-made purchases. For example, a consumer watching one of “Get a Mac” ads on their newly purchased Mac may become more satisfied with their Mac purchase. In a similar vein, a social media brand marketer might make available reviews or content (such as webcomics) about competing brands and capable of eliciting *schadenfreude*, thus increasing consumers' satisfaction with purchases of the promoted brand. Given that decision (choice) satisfaction is a

strong predictor of consumer loyalty (Heitmann et al., 2007), which in turn contributes to a firm's financial performance (Ittner & Larcker, 1998), the findings of the present research should bear significance for practitioners.

Importantly, we also find that the effect of *schadenfreude* on choice satisfaction is not restricted to suggested failures involving comparable brands or products. An implication is that situations that do not involve comparable options may elicit *schadenfreude* leading to increased consumer choice satisfaction. To cite an example, Jet Blue's "Welcome Big Wigs" campaign makes fun of senior business executives (high in social status) flying on a budget. Such messaging could trigger *schadenfreude* among some consumers without resorting to direct comparisons with other brands (Garfield, 2009). Further, such non-comparative advertising may be effective in increasing consumer choice satisfaction by means of evoking *schadenfreude*, so long as consumers are not aware that they may misattribute their feelings of *schadenfreude* to their own choices. In an online environment, viral prankvertising using acceptable targets (Luckerson, 2014) or other content featuring the downfall of high-status individuals (e.g., news about politicians' criminal convictions) may be a tool used to elicit *schadenfreude* and reinforce consumer choice satisfaction. For example, an online store might feature a news piece about a famous person's tribulations after shopping checkout, prompting consumers to feel *schadenfreude* and unconsciously become more satisfied with the online purchase they just made.

### 6.3 | Limitations and future research

The present research is not without limitations. First, it relies on the manipulation of *schadenfreude* toward a specific other (another consumer). Previous studies on *schadenfreude* have shown that it can be felt not only toward specific others (e.g., users of a competing brand) but also toward nonindividual entities, including competing brands themselves (Phillips-Melancon & Dalakas, 2014) or rival sports teams (Leach et al., 2003). While the authors believe that there is no reason to expect that the effects observed in Studies 1, 2, and 3 should be different, replication of these studies by using nonindividual entities will enable scholars to examine the extent to which the current findings generalize.

Second, the present research adopted a previously successful manipulation of *schadenfreude* toward another consumer: their status purchase signaled higher social status and subsequent product failure elicited *schadenfreude* (Sundie et al., 2009). The authors believe this manipulation to be theoretically sound as it requires prior upward comparison with another consumer who is higher in social status and subsequent downward comparison when that consumer's purchase fails. Future research should test other manipulations of *schadenfreude*, for example, asking consumers to recall the instances when they felt *schadenfreude* toward someone (Kramer et al., 2011). Alternatively, to mimic some real-life instances of *schadenfreude*, consumers may be shown a comparative ad featuring Caroline's

tribulations with a competitor brand (cf., Yucel-Aybat & Kramer, 2017), although the manipulations in Studies 1–3 are more general as they do not involve a direct comparison of choice options.

Further research may also study for how long the observed effects will persist. Will they live on until a consumer needs to repurchase a product (and thus choose their current product or a competitor product one more time) or will they dissipate by then? The answer to this question is likely to depend on the accessibility of feelings of *schadenfreude* at a particular point in time (Schwarz, 2012).

There may be a number of situational variables inherent in consumer purchases that may further moderate our observed effects. For example, a high degree of choice conflict (Chernev, Böckenholt, & Goodman, 2015) or of product involvement (Korgaonkar & Moschis, 1982; Olsen, 2007) should increase the observed effects, making consumers more likely to attend to positive information in their evaluations of their choices.

Individual differences may regulate how likely consumers are to apply feelings of *schadenfreude* to their judgments. For instance, need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Haddock, Maio, Arnold, & Huskinson, 2008), need for affect (Maio & Esses, 2001), and consumer preference for intuitive-experiential or analytical-rational thinking styles (Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj, & Heier, 1996) may also moderate the observed effects, as less affect-driven consumers may scrutinize the source of their feelings and not incorporate them into their judgments. Finally, consumer high in the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and especially psychopathy) are more inclined to feel *schadenfreude* (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody, & Scrutton, 2014) and thus may be more likely to feel more satisfied with their purchases when those of others fail.

Still, *schadenfreude* may be a complex emotion, but it need not sound grim. *Schadenfreude* is not always a sign of a dark personality. It is a commonly experienced emotion and it is often used in marketing. The authors thus invite further research into how consumers' satisfaction, judgment, and behavior may rest on their feeling happy for someone else's loss.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## APPENDIX A: SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES IN STUDY 2

