

Explore Situations that Generate the Emotions of Regret and Disappointment

Aakib Rahman Parray

Akal University, Talwandi Sabo

Khashiya Binte Mujeeb and Shah Mohd Khan

Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

Social emotions arise from our awareness of societal norms, rules, and goals, with strong negative emotions often resulting from the outcomes of important decisions. Among these emotions, regret and disappointment are particularly noteworthy due to their frequent occurrence and complex relationship with decision-making processes, making them a focal point of research. This study investigates the factors that trigger feelings of regret and disappointment in everyday life of students. Although, research employs a mixed-method design, however, the current reading focuses solely on the qualitative data. Using text mining and content analysis the findings identify different situations that evoke regret and disappointment among the academic students.

Keywords: Regret, Disappointment, Social, Emotions Experiences

Social emotions arise as a consequence of our understanding of societal norms, guidelines, and objectives. These emotions are shaped by our self-perception and our awareness of how others perceive us. They encompass feelings such as pride, regret, embarrassment, disappointment, guilt, and shame (Harter, 1999; Tangney & Dearing, 2003). Often, intense negative emotions stem from the outcomes of significant decisions. For instance, individuals may experience profound unhappiness after purchasing a motorcycle that turns out to be damaged or entering a relationship that doesn't align with their expectations (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017; Bacharach, 2024). Similarly, although perhaps less intense, these emotions can arise in everyday situations, such as buying a product on sale only to discover it's available at an even lower price later or enduring a disappointing movie at the cinema (Gilovich & Medvec, 1994; Johnston et al., 2024). Researchers have extensively studied these common

emotional reactions of regret and disappointment due to their prevalence and their intricate connection to the decision-making processes that shape our lives (Loomes & Sugden, 1986). A deeper understanding of these emotions provides valuable insights into how individuals cope with the outcomes of their choices and adapt to future situations. Similarly, these situations occur in students' academic lives, where studies have revealed that regret and disappointment are commonly triggered emotions (Johnston et al., 2024). These emotions often arise when students perceive that they have not met their own standards or expectations, resulting in a sense of fulfillment and a desire to change past actions or decisions (Tugade, 2011). Regret typically occurs when individuals compare the actual outcome of a choice with a better result that might have occurred if a different decision had been made, whereas disappointment arises from comparing the actual outcome with a more favorable result

that could have arisen from the same choice (Howard & Smith, 2023). These alternative outcomes may be real or constructed through counterfactual thinking. The circumstances leading to regret and disappointment differ, as exemplified by the distinction between a child being disappointed by the Tooth Fairy's forgetfulness and parents regretting the oversight (Tunc et al., 2023). Similarly, academic students often experience regret and disappointment during their educational pursuits, which may stem from academic underperformance, missed opportunities, or unmet expectations (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007).

Therefore, the current research aims to investigate the situations that give rise to feelings of disappointment and regret among academic students. This study seeks to determine whether regret and disappointment are fundamentally similar emotions with distinct names or if they are separate emotions with unique characteristics (Huang et al; 2023). Previous research comparing these emotions has been limited, with one study highlighting differences in terms of self-agency and attention. Insights into regret have been gleaned from studies where participants wrote about their major regrets, revealing that personal responsibility plays a central role in the experience of regret (Medvec et al., 2011). Additionally, another study has shown that emotions can be differentiated by feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and emotive goals. In that study, participants were asked to recall experiences of negative emotions, including regret (Larsen et al., 2017, Kumano et al., 2021).

Thus, this research aims to explore the situations that lead to regret and disappointment within the context of academic status and gender differences. This exploration suggests that when participants are asked to describe intense episodes of these emotions, distinctions will emerge that

align with the concept that regret arises when one feels responsible for an unwanted outcome, while disappointment occurs when outcomes fall short of expectations.

Research Questions

- 1) What circumstances can lead to emotions of disappointment and regret among academic students?
- 2) What common situations cause academic students to experience emotions of regret and disappointment?

Aim of the Study

Recent scholarly work has downplayed the importance of situational factors in influencing feelings of regret and disappointment. While a few contemporary theorists briefly acknowledge the role of situational elements, there has been limited research devoted to exploring social emotions such as regret, disappointment, guilt, shame, and remorse, with notable exceptions such as Scherer's examination of how individuals subjectively evaluate events (Gehm & Scherer, 1998; Wallbott & Scherer, 1998). In alignment with these observations, the primary aim of this study is to investigate the social emotions of regret and disappointment. We aim to pinpoint the specific circumstances that trigger these emotions and identify the recurring situations that lead to the experiences of regret and disappointment.

Method

Participants

Postgraduate and undergraduate students from Aligarh Muslim University (N = 144; 87 females, 57 males; aged 18 to 27, with a mean age of 22.53 years) took part in this study as part of a course requirement. The basic demographic information collected included gender, educational level, religious affiliation, and economic status (please refer to Figure 1 for details). The study employed

a criterion-based sampling approach, where willing participants voluntarily joined the research. The research followed a sequential method design, first emphasizing qualitative data collection before moving on to quantitative data. In the qualitative phase, participants were asked to recall an event in which they experienced feelings of

disappointment and regret, providing a brief explanation and detailing the circumstances surrounding the situation. Subsequently, the quantitative data were collected using the Regret and Disappointment Questionnaire developed by Roseman et al. (1994). However, this paper exclusively focuses on the analysis of the quantitative data.

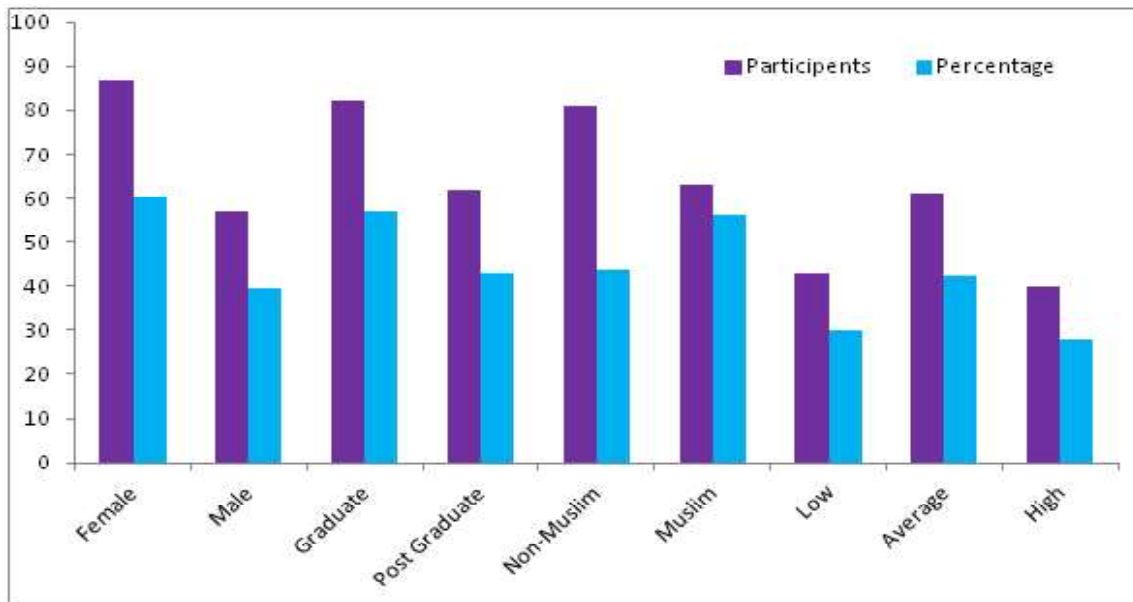


Figure 1. Socio-demographic distribution of participants (N=144)

Measures

Before collecting data, each participant was given a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose and provided with a consent form. Participants were verbally instructed to recall a past event that had evoked feelings of regret and disappointment, with clear guidance on the distinct conditions of regret and disappointment. Additionally, participants were guided through a quantitative questionnaire adapted from Roseman et al.'s research (1994) to assess various aspects of their emotional experience, including feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and emotive goals. They were asked to rate the intensity of their feelings on a 9-point scale, ranging from "not at all" (1) to

"to a very great extent" (9). However, it's important to note that this paper exclusively focuses on the qualitative analysis.

For analysis, a combination of text mining and content analysis techniques was applied using software tools such as Rapid Miner and Nvivo. This procedure involved a series of necessary steps, as depicted in Figure 2. Text mining and content analysis are methodologies utilized for the quantitative evaluation of specific content elements (Eriyanto, 2011). This approach entails the quantitative assessment or computation of attributes within the content (Eriyanto, 2011). Content analysis is primarily employed to examine individual perspectives in various mediums, including interviews and written materials (Eriyanto, 2011). (See Figure 2)

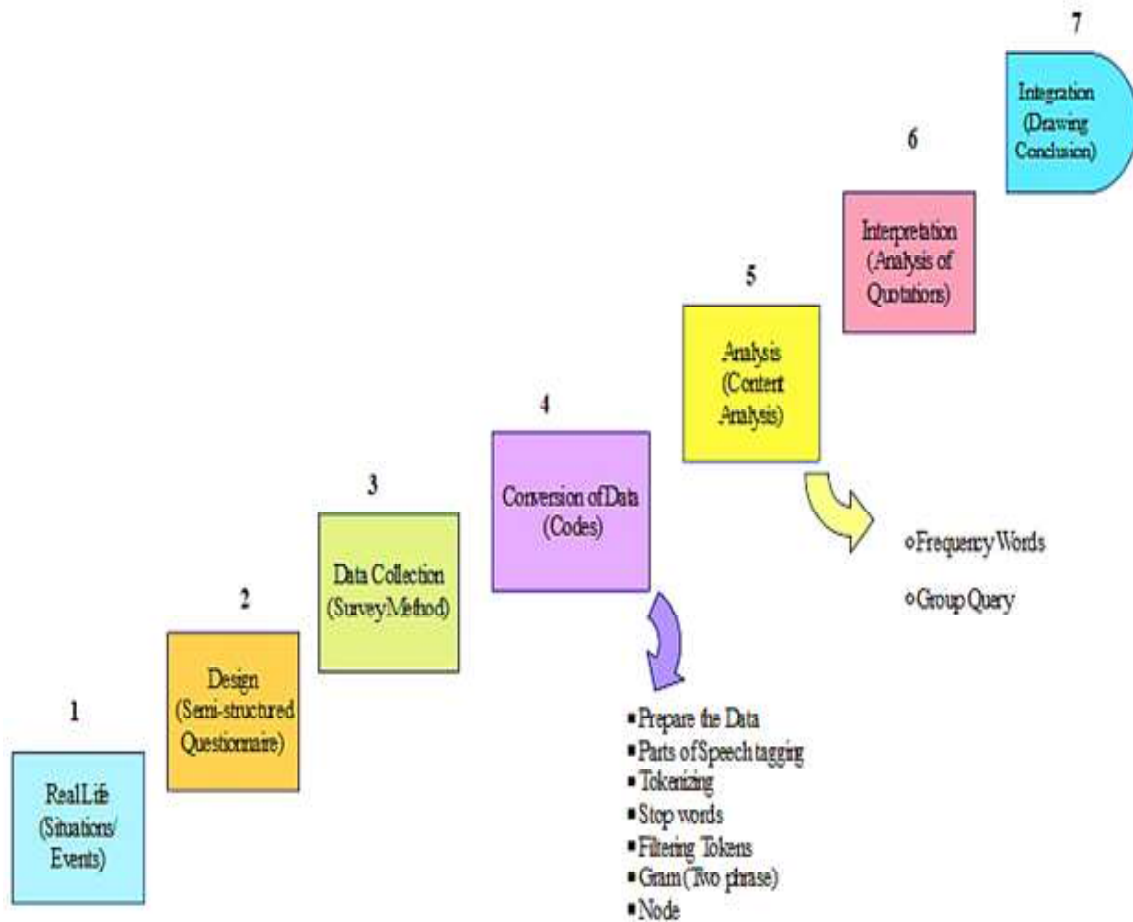


Figure 2.

Results

The data was first entered into Rapid Miner version 9.9 version software. The software is capable of processing both quantitative and qualitative data. The present study uses the software for the purpose of generating codes as followed by Tesch's eight-step text mining methodology given in year 1990. This thorough seven-step process began with data preparation and culminated in the final code. As a result of the text mining process, the research identified the 21 most frequently occurring words in the responses related to regret, as reported by the participants. (See Figure 3).

Subsequently, the generated codes were systematically compared to each participant's responses one by one. This comparison and matching process was facilitated using Nvivo 12 software, which is specialized for content analysis. Consequently, the final set of codes was created with the aid of Nvivo software. The initial categorization of the source data into nodes was executed, resulting in a total of 21 parent nodes (see fig) being identified and finalized. These parent nodes collectively encompassed 458 individual references (See Table 1).

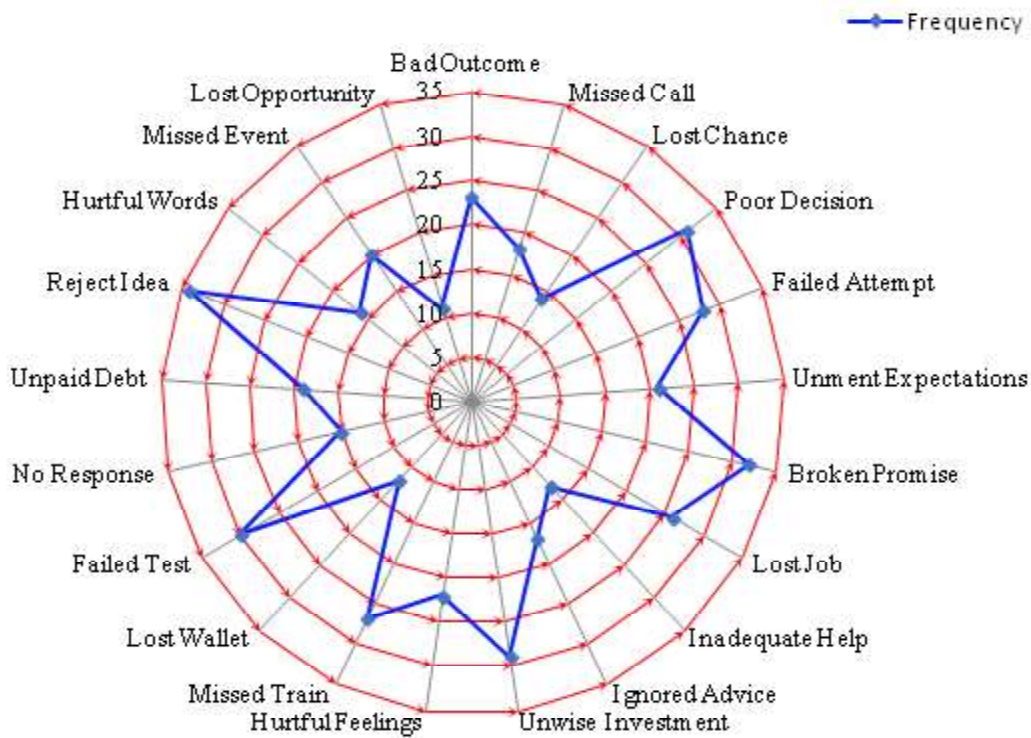


Figure 3

Table 1.

Disappointment Situation	Examples	Relative Frequency
Bad Outcome	"Missed a promotion at work and got a negative performance review"	23
Missed Call	"Couldn't answer an important call from a potential employer"	18
Lost Chance	"Regret not asking out a person you had a crush on"	14
Poor Decision	"Regret buying an expensive gadget that turned out to be faulty"	31
Failed Attempt	"Attempted to learn a new language but gave up after a week"	28
Unmet Expectations	"Planned a surprise party, but only a few guests showed up"	21
Broken Promise	"Promised to help a friend move but backed out last minute"	32
Lost Job	"Got laid off due to downsizing at the company"	26
Inadequate Help	"Didn't offer assistance to a friend going through a tough time"	13
Ignored Advice	"Ignored advice to back up important files, lost data as a result"	17
Unwise Investment	"Invested in a crypto currency that experienced a major crash"	29
Hurtful Feelings	"Said something hurtful to a family member during an argument"	22

Missed Train	"Missed a train and was late for an important meeting"	27
Lost Wallet	"Left wallet at a restaurant and couldn't find it later"	12
Failed Test	"Failed a final exam after not studying enough"	30
No Response	"Sent a text to a friend asking for help, but received no reply"	15
Unpaid Debt	"Lent money to a friend who never paid it back"	19
Reject Idea	"Shared a business idea that was dismissed by potential investors"	34
Hurtful Words	"Said hurtful words to a partner during an argument"	16
Missed Event	"Couldn't attend a family wedding due to a work commitment"	20
Lost Opportunity	"Passed on an opportunity to travel abroad for a job interview"	11

Note. Total References= 458

These twenty-one parent node categories were *Bad Outcome, Missed Call, Lost Chance, Poor Decision, Failed Attempt, Unmet Expectations, Broken, Promise, Lost Job, Inadequate Help, Ignored Advice, Unwise Investment, Hurtful Feelings, Missed Train, Lost Wallet, Failed Test, No Response, Unpaid Debt, Reject Idea, Hurtful Words, Missed Event, and Lost Opportunity*. The table 3.1 displays the relative frequency of each category along with the associated references. In this study, these parent node categories are regarded as the situations in

which individuals have experienced the social emotion of regret in their lives.

For the Emotion of Disappointment, a similar coding formation process was employed, commencing with Rapid Miner for word frequency analysis, followed by node creation and cluster analysis facilitated by Nvivo 12 software. Utilizing text mining in Rapid Miner, the 23 most frequently appearing words in the responses related to disappointment, as reported by the participants, were identified. Please refer to the figure for details. (See Figure 4).

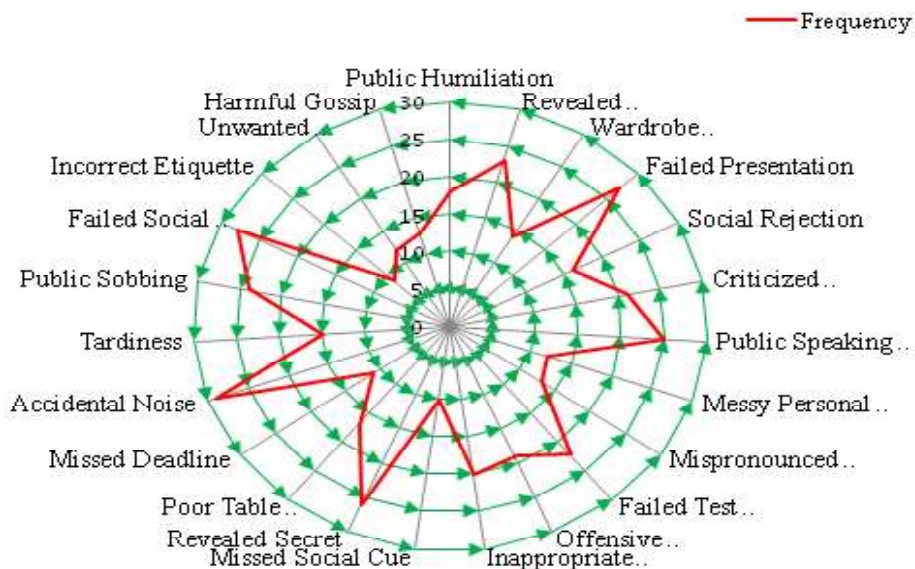


Figure 4.

The Emotion of disappointment, the identical procedure, as employed in generating child codes for guilt emotions, was applied to identify parent nodes associated with shame situations using Rapid Miner and Nvivo software. In the context of

experiences related to shame responses, the initial organization and categorization of source data or codes into nodes were executed, resulting in a total of 23 parent nodes being established, which collectively encompassed 310 references.

Table 2. Regret situations with relative frequencies

Regret Situations	Example	Relative Frequency
Public Humiliation	<i>"Tripped and fell in front of a large audience"</i>	18
Revealed Embarrassment	<i>"Someone shared an embarrassing story about you to others"</i>	23
Wardrobe Malfunction	<i>"Accidentally flashed someone due to a clothing mishap"</i>	14
Failed Presentation	<i>"Made numerous mistakes while giving a presentation"</i>	27
Social Rejection	<i>"Got excluded from a friend group during an event"</i>	16
Criticized Appearance	<i>"Received negative comments about your looks"</i>	21
Public Speaking Fiasco	<i>"Forgot your speech in the middle of an important talk"</i>	25
Messy Personal Space	<i>"Friends unexpectedly visited, and your home was a mess"</i>	12
Mispronounced Words	<i>"Mispronounced key words during a formal speech"</i>	13
Failed Presentation	<i>"Performed poorly on an exam in front of classmates"</i>	22
Offensive Comment	<i>"Made an inappropriate remark without realizing it"</i>	19
Inappropriate Behavior	<i>"Acted inappropriately at a formal event"</i>	20
Missed Social Cue	<i>"Laughed at a joke at an inappropriate moment"</i>	10
Revealed Secret	<i>"Accidentally disclosed a sensitive secret to someone"</i>	26
Poor Table Manners	<i>"Displayed bad table manners during a formal dinner"</i>	17
Missed Deadline	<i>"Failed to submit a crucial project on time"</i>	11
Accidental Noise	<i>"Caused a loud disruption in a quiet setting"</i>	29
Tardiness	<i>"Arrived late to an important event or meeting"</i>	15
Public Sobbing	<i>"Cried uncontrollably in a public setting"</i>	24
Failed Social Norms	<i>"Unintentionally violated social norms in a public place"</i>	28
Incorrect Etiquette	<i>"Used the wrong etiquette during a formal event"</i>	9
Unwanted Attention	<i>"Drew attention to yourself in an undesirable way"</i>	12
Harmful Gossip	<i>"Spread harmful gossip about someone, realizing its impact"</i>	13

Note. Total References= 424

These twenty-three parent node categories *public humiliation, revealed embarrassment, wardrobe malfunction, failed presentation, social rejection, criticized appearance, public speaking fiasco, messy personal space, mispronounced words, failed presentation, offensive comment, inappropriate behavior, Missed Social Cue, Revealed Secret, Poor. Table Manners, Missed Deadline, Accidental Noise, Tardiness, Public Sobbing, Failed Social Norms, Incorrect Etiquette, Unwanted Attention, Harmful Gossip.* The table 3.2

displays the relative frequency of each category along with the associated references. In this study, these parent node categories are regarded as the situations in which individuals have experienced the social emotion of shame in their lives.

In the depicted figure below, the results of the group query reveal eleven situations that frequently trigger feelings of regret and disappointment. However, there is a variation in the frequency of occurrence among these eleven common situations. (See Figure 5).

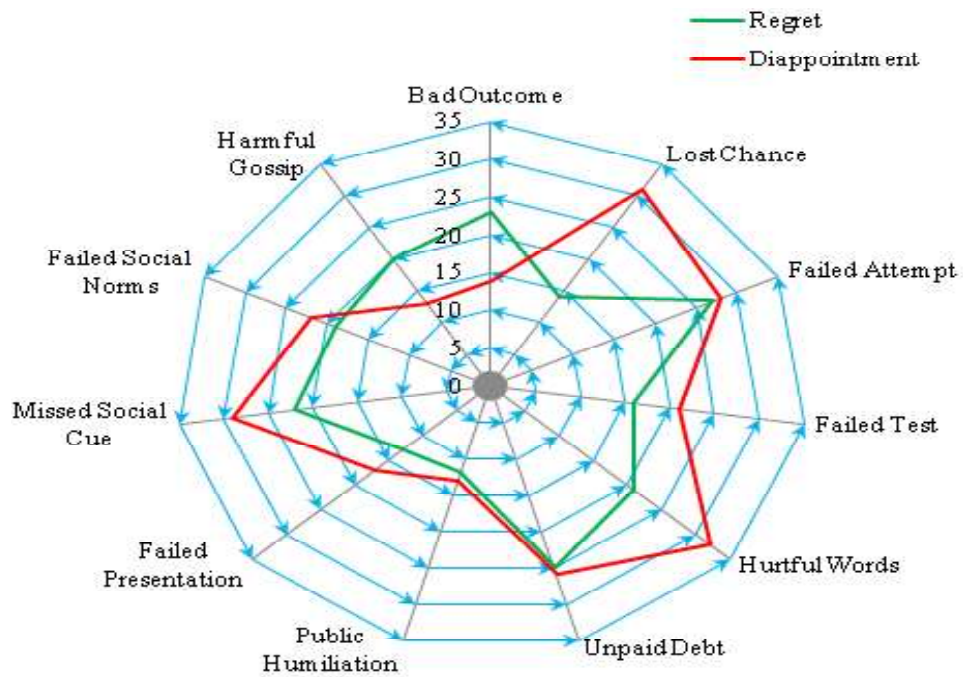


Figure 5.

The green line represents the frequency of regret emotions, with bad outcomes, harmful gossip, failed social norms, missed social cues, unpaid debts, and failed attempts having a higher frequency compared to last chances, failed tests, public humiliations, failed presentations. Conversely, the red line represents the frequency of disappointment in common situations, with lost chances, failed attempts, hurtful words, unpaid debts, missed social

cues, and failed social norms having a higher frequency compared to failed tests, public humiliations, failed presentations, failed social norms, harmful gossip, and bad outcomes. Thus, these common situations have been identified as triggers for the emotions of regret and disappointment, aligning with the second aim of our research, which is to compile a list of common situations that elicit these social emotions.

Discussion

This study aimed to gain insights into the situations that give rise to the emotions of regret and disappointment. While existing literature provides substantial evidence of the occurrences of regret and disappointment in individuals' daily lives, an empirical approach to identify the specific situations triggering these emotions has been lacking. To address this gap, we employed an exploratory sequential mixed-method design to pinpoint the situations associated with regret and disappointment. However, this discussion will focus solely on the results and discussion of the qualitative research approach.

In light of the study's aims, which were "identify the situations of regret and disappointment" and "pinpoint the common situations of regret and disappointment", our findings shed light on significant situations that elicit these social emotions among academic students. The study revealed numerous distinct situations associated with generating the emotions of regret and disappointment. Notably, the relative frequency of regret-inducing situations appears to be higher than those inducing disappointment. This observation aligns with the insights drawn from the work of Roseman et al. (1994), which suggests that these two emotions can be distinguished based on various elements they encompass, such as feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and motivational goals.

Moreover, regret often takes precedence over disappointment due to the cognitive process of counterfactual thinking. When individuals experience regret, they naturally engage in counterfactual thinking, imagining different decisions or actions that could have led to a more favorable outcome. This mental replay of alternative scenarios intensifies the feeling of regret, making it a prominent emotion when individuals reflect on their past choices. In contrast, disappointment typically

arises from outcomes perceived as beyond one's control, leading to a reduced inclination for counterfactual thinking and, therefore, a lesser emphasis on alternative choices or actions.

Furthermore, personal responsibility is closely associated with these emotions. Regret is intricately tied to a sense of personal responsibility and agency in the outcome. When individuals believe they had control over a situation and that their choices played a role in a negative outcome, they are more likely to experience regret. Disappointment, conversely, frequently stems from external factors or circumstances beyond one's control. This distinction in perceived responsibility results in a more profound emotional impact for regret, as individuals grapple with the idea that they could have made different choices to achieve a better result, while disappointment often carries a perception of being at the mercy of external forces, reducing the weight of personal culpability.

Furthermore, individuals experiencing disappointment may feel a lack of control over their destiny, which can lead to feelings of powerlessness. This contrasts with the experience of regret, where individuals typically feel more responsible for causing the event. As a result of this perceived lack of control, individuals experiencing disappointment may become passive or divert their attention to unrelated matters (Seligman, 1975).

In summary, this study sheds light on the situations that evoke feelings of regret and disappointment among academic students. These emotions, which are deeply intertwined with the decisions, expectations, and circumstances in various areas of life, are commonly experienced in relation to career and education, relationships, financial choices, health and lifestyle decisions, missed opportunities, parenting challenges,

the pursuit of personal goals, and ethical dilemmas. The influence of social and peer pressure, along with hindsight bias, adds further complexity to these emotions. Thus, these findings enhance our understanding of human emotions and their significant role in shaping decision-making processes and life experiences.

References

- Bacharach, J. (2024). Agent-Regret, Finitude, and the Irrevocability of the Past. *Topoi*, 43(2), 447-458.
- Gilovich, T., & Medvec, V. H. (1994). The temporal pattern to the experience of regret. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(3), 357-365.
- Harter, S. (1999). The construction of the self: A developmental perspective. *Guilford Press*.
- Howard, M. C., & Smith, M. B. (2023). Employee regret and disappointment: Creation of a scale and foundational application of the approach/avoidance framework. *Applied Psychology*, 72(2), 419-450.
- Huang, Y., Pat, N., Kok, B. C., Chai, J., Feng, L., & Yu, R. (2023). Getting over past mistakes: prospective and retrospective regret in older adults. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 78(3), 469-478.
- Johnston, M., McCormack, T., Lorimer, S., Corbett, B., Beck, S. R., Hoerl, C., & Feeney, A. (2024). Relieved or disappointed? Children's understanding of how others feel at the cessation of events. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 246, 106016.
- Johnston, M., McCormack, T., Lorimer, S., Corbett, B., Beck, S. R., Hoerl, C., & Feeney, A. (2024). Relieved or disappointed? Children's understanding of how others feel at the cessation of events. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 246, 106016.
- Larsen, R. J., Hemenover, S. H., Norris, C. J., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2017). Turning adversity to advantage: On the virtues of the coactivation of positive and negative emotions. *Emotion Review*, 9(3), 225-229.
- Loomes, G., & Sugden, R. (1986). Disappointment and dynamic consistency in choice under uncertainty. *Review of Economic Studies*, 53(2), 271-282.
- Medvec, V. H., Madey, S. F., & Gilovich, T. (2011). When less is more: Counterfactual thinking and satisfaction among Olympic medalists. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(3), 319-327.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2017). Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics and Change. *Guilford Publications*.
- Tangney, J. P., & Dearing, R. L. (2003). Shame and guilt. *Guilford Press*.
- Tugade, M. M. (2011). Regulation of Positive Emotions: Emotion Regulation Strategies that Promote Resilience. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 12(2), 311-333.
- Tunç, M. N., Brandt, M. J., & Zeelenberg, M. (2023). Not every dissatisfaction is the same: The impact of electoral regret, disappointment, and anger on subsequent electoral behavior. *Emotion*, 23(2), 554.
- Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2007) A. A Theory of Regret Regulation 1.0. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 17(1), 3-18.
- Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2007) B. A Theory of Regret Regulation 1.0. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 17(1), 3-18.
- Kumano, S., Hamilton, A., & Bahrami, B. (2021). The role of anticipated regret in choosing for others. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 12557.
- Aakib Rahman Parray**, PhD., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Akal University, Talwandi Sabo, Punjab, India. (Corresponding author)
- Khashiya Binte Mujeeb**, Research Scholar, Department of Psychiatry, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.
- Shah Mohd. Khan**, PhD., Professor, Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.