

## Effect of Moods on Perception of Organizational Justice

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aimed to identify the effect of mood on perceptions of organizational justice (distributional, procedural, interpersonal, and informational), expecting that those with pleasant moods tend to perceive a work situation as more fair, and those with unpleasant moods are more likely to see work events as less fair.

**Methods:** The sample consisted of 180 Kuwaiti employees divided evenly among the three experimental groups (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral groups). Each group watched either positive, negative, or neutral film. The study used the Organizational Justice Measure and the Brief Mood Introspection Survey.

**Results:** The repeated measures ANCOVA for the effects of mood on the justice measure, after controlling for pre-mood and the pre-justice scores, showed a significant difference among the three mood groups. The pleasant group had a higher justice mean than the unpleasant and neutral groups. However, no significant difference was found between the unpleasant and neutral groups. Also, there was no significant interaction between the justice type (distributional, procedural, interpersonal, and informational) and mood group (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral).

**Conclusions:** A pleasant mood may have a stronger effect on justice perception than an unpleasant mood. Suggesting that mood affects justice in a consistent way regardless of justice type. Justice perceptions are inherently subjective and are receptive to the effects of internal states. And that mood states that have no logical relationship with the justice of the situation may serve as inputs in the justice judgment process, highlighting the subjective quality of justice perception.

**Keywords:** organizational justice; moods; film; fairness; perception.

### تأثير المزاج على إدراك العدالة التنظيمية

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### ملخص

الدراسة تهدف إلى معرفة أثر الحالة المزاجية على إدراك الفرد للعدالة التنظيمية وإبعادها (العدالة التوزيعية، العدالة الإجرائية، العدالة التفاعلية، العدالة المعلوماتية، وبيان ما إذا كانت هناك فروق دالة إحصائية بين الجنسين في متغيرات الدراسة. حيث تكونت عينة الدراسة من 180 فرداً من موظفين جامعة الكويت 90 ذكراً، و 90 إناثاً، بمتوسط عمر 34,4 (ع = 6.8) تم تقسيمهم على ثلاث مجموعات تجريبية. وتم استخدام مقياس العدالة التنظيمية من إعداد "الخضر و جاد الرب" (2016) ومقياس التحقق من الحالة المزاجية (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988) المترجم والمقنن على البيئة الكويتية من قبل الباحثين. دلت نتائج الدراسة على وجود أثر دال للمزاج الإيجابي والمزاج السلبي على إدراك الأفراد للعدالة التنظيمية بأبعادها الأربعة، حيث رفع المزاج الإيجابي من إدراك الأفراد للعدالة وخفض المزاج السلبي من إدراكهم للعدالة. كما دلت النتائج أيضاً على أن هناك فروق بالنوع في متوسط إدراك كل من العدالة التنظيمية والعدالة التوزيعية والعدالة التفاعلية والعدالة المعلوماتية بعد عرض الفيلم الإيجابي وذلك لصالح الذكور، ووجود فروق بالنوع في متوسط إدراك كل من العدالة التنظيمية، والعدالة التفاعلية، والعدالة المعلوماتية بعد عرض الفيلم السلبي وذلك لصالح الذكور. وخيراً هناك فروق بالنوع في متوسط إدراك العدالة التوزيعية بعد عرض الفيلم المحايد وذلك لصالح الذكور.

الكلمات الدالة: العدالة التنظيمية، المزاج، فيلم، الإنصاف، الإدراك.

## Introduction

Researchers are interested in how justice perception forms because of its association with human attitudes and behaviors and how people think, feel, and behave (Ambrose & Kulik, 2001; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). People are not just concerned with the absolute value of the outcomes they receive, such as salaries and promotions. They also care if these outcomes are fairly distributed relative to those of others (distributive justice), decisions are made properly (procedural justice), they are treated humanely (interpersonal justice), and they are provided with clear and timely information (informational justice) (Greenberg, 2011; Knoche & Waples, 2016). However, the perception of justice is not merely an objective process of an individual's cognitive response to environmental events, such as decision outcomes and human resource practices, but an emotionally laden and subjective experience that is affected by a person's mood (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, we adopt the definition of mood used by Van Kleef (2018) as a "diffuse and undifferentiated feeling states that are not connected to a particular antecedent or object" (p.4). We use the term mood in this study to refer to the positive (pleasant) or negative (unpleasant) short-term affective state that is caused by watching a positive and negative short film.

There are limited studies regarding the possible role that mood may play in the process of forming justice perception in an organizational setting (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007; Cohen-Charash & Byrne, 2008; Greenberg, 2011). Barsky & Kaplan's study was a systematic meta-analysis review for the literature that adopted the three model of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional justices). Unlike many studies in the field that have linked justice and mood in social settings (e.g., Forgas, 1995, 2003), this study relates organizational justice and mood specifically to organizational settings. That is how pleasant and unpleasant mood might change individual perceptions of organizational justice. It uses a sample that is not "WEIRD" (western, educated, from industrialized, and democratic societies). As noted by Cohen-Charash and Byrne (2008) in their extensive study, only one study (Mikula et al. 1998) examined the potential for culture to influence the affect-justice relationship. Again, the investigated affect in Mikula, et. al.'s study was the emotions not the moods.

Mood is one of the primary forces that influence social cognition and behavior (Fiedler, 2001; Forgas & Eich, 2012; Schwarz & Strack, 1999) and plays an important role in work-related social judgments (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Mood may precede, accompany, or serve as an outcome of organizational justice perception. Individuals with pleasant moods tend to provide more positive information, be more optimistic, and behave confidently and assertively (Forgas & George, 2001; Isen, 1999). Overall et al. (2020) found that partners' greater emotional expression predicted perceivers more accurately tracking partners' negative emotions (greater tracking accuracy). And that high levels of partners' emotional expression also predicted perceivers overestimating partners' negative emotions. The affect infusion model (AIM, Forgas, 1995; 2003) predicts that affect can influence judgment in complex and expected situations. It suggests that when individuals are in the process of forming justice judgments, they first search for relevant information about justice situations, such as those involving organizational justice. When they lack such information, and to avoid uncertainty, they use other information as heuristic substitutes to assess the fairness of the situation.

After experimentally manipulating affect, Van den Bos (2003) found that participants viewed procedures as more fair when they were in a pleasant mood and less fair when they were in a unpleasant mood. In contrast, individuals with unpleasant moods pay greater attention to external information, are better at detecting deception (Forgas & East, 2008), and are less susceptible to judgmental errors (Forgas, 2011). Unpleasant mood promotes selective recall and the use of negative information that produces more pessimistic, cautious, and socially constrained decisions (Forgas, 2002). Forgas and Tan (2013) found that unpleasant mood can increase the rejection of unfair offers, consistent with increased concerns regarding fairness. Their result was explained in light of affect-cognitive theories that suggest that negative affect induces more externally oriented accommodative thinking and more concern for social norms.

What we describe so far reflects the process whereby someone's own affect influences their own social judgments, such as perceptions of justice (Mao et al., 2018) and cooperative behavior (Lin et al., 2017). However, recent study by Goldring and Bolger (2021) suggests that rather than conceptualize interpersonal evaluations as occurring solely within an individual, the interpersonal evaluations occur as fundamentally dyadic (dyadic affect infusion/diffusion) phenomena. Using six weeks

of daily diary data from 311 couples in which one member approached a stressful event, they found that mood influences relationship evaluations at both the intraindividual (affect infusion) and interindividual (affect diffusion) levels. Both affect infusion and affect diffusion are turned off by the availability of attributional information,

Much of the literature studying organizational justice and affects (moods and emotions) treated justice as a predictor of affective reactions (Cohen-Charash & Byrne, 2008). And much of the research conducted so far concentrated on emotions more than on moods (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007; Cohen-Charash & Byrne, 2008; Greenberg, 2011). This study uses positive (pleasant) and negative (unpleasant) moods as antecedent/predictor to justice perception. In this context, the literature hardly differentiates among the four type of justices in its relationship with moods. The theories explained above, which proposed to explain this relationship, can be used reasonably well with each type of justice (see for example Van den Bos, 2003; and Byrne et al., 2003). But some research studies found that people in a positive mood tend to rate all types of organizational justice significantly higher than those individuals in an unpleasant mood (Begley & Lee, 2005; Byrne et al., 2003). Begley and Lee's (2005) study also showed that those with a low negative affect have a larger decline in distributive justice perception.

Accordingly, this study assesses the effect of individuals' moods on perceptions of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational), expecting that those with pleasant mood tend to perceive a work situation as more fair, and those with unpleasant mood are more likely to see work events as less fair. We manipulated the participants' moods using positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant), and neutral (control group) short films. Accordingly, we proposed two hypotheses here:

1. *There is a significant difference among mood group means, whereas the pleasant group will get a significantly higher justice mean than the unpleasant and control groups, and the unpleasant group will get a significantly lower justice mean than the control group.*
2. *There is no significant interaction between justice type (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational) and mood group (pleasant, unpleasant, and control).*

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

In total, 180 employees at Kuwait University (age  $M = 34.4$ ,  $SD = 6.8$ ; male  $n = 90$  and female  $n = 90$ ) participated in this study. The participants were supporting staff from different departments at KU (e.g. public relation, registration, graduation departments, and long distant learning center) located in two campuses. All holding at least Bachelor's degree in different majors. They were personally contacted and recruited during business hours. Participation was entirely voluntary, and their responses were anonymous. We had no missing responses.

### **Tools and Measures**

*Organizational justice.* This study used the Arabic measure for organizational justice (Alkhadher & Gadelrab, 2016), which includes 17 items to assess distributive (five items), procedural (four items), interpersonal (four items), and informational (four items) aspects of organizational justice. The measure was developed for Arabic culture and investigated its criterion and construct validity using Kuwaiti samples. Item of this measure generated after reviewing the literature of organizational justice to ensure their relevancy to the sample's culture. The measure assesses fairness of the supervisor and the organization as a whole. The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). In this study, the alpha reliabilities for the four types of justice before and after watching the film ranged between .74 and .93. The measure has shown concurrent validity with the Arabic version of Colquitt's (2001) measure of organizational justice (Fischer, et al., 2011) and other outcomes, including collective esteem, organizational commitment, and instrumentality (Gadelrab & Alkhadher, 2017).

*Mood.* This study used the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS, Mayer & Gaschke, 1988). The BMIS asked the

participants to describe their feelings at the moment of completing the scale (that is, how the person was feeling at that moment) by rating 16 mood adjectives (eight pleasant: calm, active caring, happy, content, peppy, lively, and loving; and eight unpleasant: drowsy, grouchy, fed up, gloomy, jittery, tired, sad, and nervous) on a 4-point response scale (that is, 1=definitely do not feel; 2=do not feel; 3=slightly feel; and 4=definitely feel). The scale was translated into Arabic by the first author and checked by English language staff at Kuwait University. The responses for the pleasant mood adjectives were combined with the unpleasant mood adjectives after reverse scoring the latter to determine the overall pleasant/unpleasant mood score. Higher scores represented better moods. Cronbach's alpha was .85. This Arabic version showed concurrent validity with job satisfaction (.42), trust (.37), and organizational commitment (.30) and demonstrated .84 alpha reliability (Alenizi, 2019).

*Film.* The films were presented via tablet using headphones and lasted approximately three minutes. The positive film contained scenes of children laughing. The negative film showed scenes of poor Muslim from Rohingya. The neutral film showed how to draw geometric shapes (see the links for the three films in the note section). The authors tested the three films among 300 college students at Kuwait University (50% males), independent from the study sample, to ensure that they were capable of evoking the mood intended (Martin et al., 1997). As shown in Table 1, The differences among the three film groups were significant ( $F = 24.46, p < .01$ ) as well as the interaction effect ( $F = 53.08, p < .01$ ). Those who watched the positive film ( $n = 100$ ) had higher mood scores after watching it ( $M = 53.5, SD = 7.0$ ) than before watching it ( $M = 47.2, SD = 8.0$ ). Those who watched the negative film ( $n = 100$ ) had significantly lower mood scores after watching it ( $M = 41.1, SD = 8.1$ ) than before watching it ( $M = 45.6, SD = 7.6$ ). As expected, there were no significant changes in the participants' moods among those who watched the neutral film (before,  $M = 45.7, SD = 8.6$ ; after,  $M = 45.1, SD = 9.5$ ).

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Mood for the Three Groups and the significance of interaction and group effects**

Groups	Pre-Mood		Post-Mood		$F_{group}$ (Effect Size)*	$F_{int}$ (Effect Size)*
	M	SD	M	SD		
Pleasant	47.2 <sub>a</sub>	8.0	53.5 <sub>b</sub>	7.0	53.08	24.46
Unpleasant	45.6 <sub>a</sub>	7.6	41.1 <sub>b</sub>	8.1	$P < .001$	$P < .001$
Neutral	45.7 <sub>a</sub>	8.7	45.1 <sub>a</sub>	9.6	(.263)	(.141)

*Note.* Means not sharing a subscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  according to Bonferroni-corrected post hoc test.

$F_{group}$  =  $F$  value for differences among group means;  $F_{int}$  =  $F$  value for interaction between justice by group.

\* Eta Square values.

### Procedure

This experiment was conducted individually during business hours in each participant's office. They were told that the study assessed justice perception. First, the participant completed the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (*BMIS*, Mayer & Gaschke, 1988) and the organizational justice measure (Alkhadher & Gadelrab, 2016). Then each subject was randomly assigned to one of the three experimental groups. The first group watched a short positive film (the mood induction), the second a negative film, and the third a neutral film. No information was provided about the type of the film. Before leaving, they again completed the *BMIS* and the justice measure. Thus, mood was the independent variable, and the post-justice perception was the dependent variable. After watching the film, the participants again completed the mood scale for mood validation and the organizational justice measure. The experiment lasted 18–25 minutes.

## Results

This study aimed to identify the effect of mood on perceptions of organizational justice (distributional, procedural, interpersonal, and informational), expecting that those with pleasant moods tend to perceive a work situation as more fair, and those with unpleasant moods are more likely to see work events as less fair. The results showed that the pre-film mood correlated positively and significantly with all the pre-film justice measures. The same pattern was found in the post-film mood, wherein mood correlated positively and significantly with all the post-film justice measures (Table 2).

**Table 2. Correlations among mood and justice measures for the three groups (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Moods T1	<i>.84</i>									
2. Distributive T1	.16*	.86								
3. Procedural T1	.35**	.48**	.74							
4. Interpersonal T1	.28**	.38**	.61**	.88						
5. Informational T1	.28**	.45**	.64**	.71**	.82					
6. Moods T2	.58**					.87				
7. Distributive T2						.24**	.91			
8. Procedural T2						.25**	.46**	.80		
9. Interpersonal T2						.17*	.38**	.63**	.91	
10. Informational T2						.22**	.46**	.68**	.71**	.87

Note: T1=before watching film and T2=after watching film. Figures in italics are reliability coefficients. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Again, and as a manipulation check, we examined if moods changed by condition as predicted. As shown in Table 3, The differences among the three groups were significant ( $F = 8.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as the interaction effect ( $F = 33.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who watched the positive film had higher mood scores after watching it ( $M = 46.8$ ,  $SD = 9.6$ ) than before watching it ( $M = 42.6$ ,  $SD = 7.7$ ). Those who watched the negative film had significantly lower mood scores after watching it ( $M = 42.3$ ,  $SD = 8.9$ ) than before watching it ( $M = 48.6$ ,  $SD = 8.4$ ). As expected, there were no significant changes in the participants' moods among those who watched the neutral film (before,  $M = 49.4$ ,  $SD = 8.4$ ; after,  $M = 50.7$ ,  $SD = 8.4$ ). This suggests that the mood manipulation produced different types of mood states.

**Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Mood for the Three Groups and the significance of interaction and group effects**

Groups	Pre-Mood		Post-Mood		$F_{group}$ (Effect Size)*	$F_{int}$ (Effect Size)*
	M	SD	M	SD		
Pleasant	42.6 <sub>a</sub>	7.7	46.8 <sub>b</sub>	9.6	8.16	33.87
Unpleasant	48.6 <sub>a</sub>	8.4	42.3 <sub>b</sub>	8.9	$P < .001$	$P < .001$
Neutral	49.4 <sub>a</sub>	8.4	50.7 <sub>a</sub>	8.4	(.084)	(.277)

Note. Means not sharing a subscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  according to Bonferroni-corrected post hoc test.

$F_{group}$  =  $F$  value for differences among group means;  $F_{int}$  =  $F$  value for interaction between justice by group.

\* Eta Square values

However, since the pre-mood levels for the three groups are different within each other ( $F(2,177) = 12.31, p < .001$ ), we controlled its effects, along with the corresponding pre-justice score using repeated measures ANCOVA. Concerning the first hypothesis, Table 4 shows means and standard deviations for justice types by mood groups and the significance of interaction and group effects after controlling for pre-mood effects and pre-justice scores. As expected, there was a significant difference among the three mood groups ( $F_{\text{group}}(2, 172) = 20.48, p < .001$ ). A Bonferroni-corrected post hoc test revealed that there were significant differences in justice scores between the pleasant group and the unpleasant group and between the pleasant group and the control group. However, no significant difference was found between the unpleasant group and the control group.

Investigating the second hypothesis, Table 4 shows no interaction effects between the mood groups by justice type  $F_{\text{int}}(1, 3)=1.22, p=.295$ ), confirming that mood affects justice in a consistent way regardless of justice type (distributional, procedural, interpersonal, and informational).

**Table 4. Means and standard deviations for justice types by mood groups and the significance of interaction and group effects**

Groups	Distributive		Procedural		Interpersonal		Informational		Justice		$F_{\text{group}}$	$F_{\text{int}}$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	(Effect Size)*	(Effect Size)*
Pleasant	3.4	0.9	2.6	0.7	3.1	0.7	2.8	0.7	2.96	0.58	20.48	1.22
Unpleasant	2.9	1.0	2.4	0.8	3.0	0.9	2.7	0.8	2.77	0.74	$P<.001$	$P=.295$
Neutral	2.92	0.9	2.5	0.7	2.9	0.8	2.7	0.7	2.76	0.63	(.192)	(.021)

*Note.* Means not sharing a subscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  according to Bonferroni-corrected post hoc test.

$F_{\text{group}} = F$  value for differences among group means;  $F_{\text{int}} = F$  value for interaction between justice by group.

\* Eta Square values

### Discussion and conclusion

Some researchers described the evaluation of fairness as a purely cognitive process (Adams, 1963; Jasso, 1980; Markovsky, 1985). Others described the effects of mood and emotion on the individual's cognitive processes (Isen, 1987; Schwarz, 1990; Sinclair & Mark, 1992). More recently, the literature has tended to view justice as a phenomenon with a cognitive basis (e.g., Colquitt, 2001), and injustice as a phenomenon with an emotional basis (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 2002). The study of mood on justice perception has gotten more attention recently (Cohen-Charash & Byrne, 2008). However, few researchers have examined the role of mood as an antecedent of justice judgments.

The first hypothesis expected that there would be a significant difference among mood group means, wherein the pleasant group would get a significantly higher justice mean than the unpleasant and control groups, and the unpleasant group would get a significantly lower justice mean than the control group. The results confirmed that there is a significant difference among the three mood groups, wherein the pleasant group got a higher justice mean than the unpleasant group and the control group. But contrary to what was expected, no difference was found between the unpleasant group and the control group. These results confirmed what other studies found, that people in a pleasant mood tend to rate all types of organizational justice significantly higher than those people in a unpleasant mood (Begley & Lee, 2005; Byrne et al, 2003), suggesting that a pleasant mood may have a stronger effect on justice perception than a unpleasant mood. This finding confirms the notion that justice judgments can be subjective and not merely just a result of rational cognitive processes. The study also supports the notion found in recent studies that own affect influences own social judgments, perceptions of justice, and cooperative behavior (Lin et al., 2017; Mao et al., 2018).

Moods can fluctuate within the same day or within a short time period regardless of any significant changes in one's life (Watson, 2000). This can lead to rapid fluctuations in a person's perception of the justice evaluation of aspects of work

within a short period of time, causing irritability and becoming problematic for a fair assessment. As suggested by Goldring and Bolger (2021), the result found in this study could be explain by the dyadic affect (infusion/diffusion) phenomena, not merely conceptualizing interpersonal evaluations as occurring solely within an individual.

Although the literature hardly differentiates among the types of justices and their relationship with moods, a few studies have investigated this using the four types in one study. The results found here confirmed that mood does indeed have similar effects regardless of the type of organizational justice used. Therefore, the theories that proposed to explain the mood-justice relationship can be used reasonably well with each type of justice (Van den Bos, 2003; Byrne et al., 2003).

Moreover, much of the literature has focused on injustice, although calling it justice (Bies & Tripp, 2002). Consequently, most studies concentrated on negative affect (Colquitt et al., 2013). Since both pleasant and unpleasant affect can correlate with different antecedents and consequences, scholars may lose the opportunity to have a deep theoretical understanding of an individual's reaction to perceived injustice if they concentrate only on negative affect. Pleasant affects can also be a valid resource to help one cope with feelings of injustice (Hillebrandt & Barelay, 2013). Therefore, it is important to assess the potential effects of both pleasant and unpleasant effects on behavioral outcomes.

This study was not without limitations. It used self-report measures that could have caused response bias, method bias, and/or systematic method variance. We also implemented these self-report measures in one session, which could have led to a common response-style problem.

This study showed that justice perceptions are inherently subjective and are receptive to the effects of internal states. It showed that mood states that have no logical relationship with the justice of the situation may serve as inputs in the justice judgment process, highlighting the subjective quality of justice perception. Therefore, mood cannot be ignored in justice literature (Van den Bos, 2003). Mood can be controlled or eliminated in studies examining the justice effects or relationships with other variables. Also, supervisors' awareness of the effect of mood on the perception of justice could help them balance the evaluations of their employees regarding the levels of justice in their organizations. Finally, this study used a non-Western sample, but confirms what has been found with a previous Western sample, indicating that no different pattern of effects for mood in justice perception could be expected with samples from different cultural backgrounds.

*Note.* The link for the three films as follows: Pleasant film from YouTube: <https://youtu.be/O6v8B78XIQY>; Unpleasant film from Instagram: <https://youtu.be/UJZ1QwegxOA>; Neutral film from Instagram: <https://youtu.be/P-TkVINUTyY>.

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