

**The Role of Emotional Branding in Shaping Consumer Perceptions and Loyalty in the
Cosmetics Industry**

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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This study explores how the emotional branding strategies, storytelling and brand personality, shape consumer perception and loyalty in the cosmetics industry. Using a mixed-method approach, in which facial expressions of participants were detected using the iMotions software while the participants watched selected advertisements from the popular cosmetic brands Dove and Rare Beauty, which included storytelling and brand personality elements, followed by in-depth interviews. The findings show that storytelling evoked stronger emotional responses, when it was perceived as authentic and relatable. It evoked feelings of joy, which are highly associated with brands' warmth, competence, and trustworthiness. Brand personality was only effective when it was perceived as sincere. Emotional responses worked as mediators between the branding approaches and brand perception. However, this study shows that emotional branding efforts alone are not sufficient to build long-term consumer loyalty. Other factors, such as product quality and price, remain the main aspects that can lead to repeat purchases.

Keywords:

Emotional Branding, Storytelling, Brand Personality, Consumer Perception, Brand Loyalty, Cosmetics Industry, iMotions, Facial Expression Analysis, Mixed-Methods Research, Affective Response

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical Background	3
2.1 <i>Emotional Branding</i>	3
2.2 <i>Emotional Responses to Emotional Branding</i>	5
2.3 <i>Consumer Perceptions: Warmth, Competence, and Trustworthiness</i>	7
2.4 <i>Brand Loyalty and Emotional Attachment</i>	8
3. Methodology.....	10
3.1 <i>Research Design</i>	10
3.2 <i>iMotions Stimuli Selection and Emotional Data Collection</i>	12
3.3 <i>Semi-Structured Interviews</i>	13
3.4 <i>Sample and Recruitment</i>	14
4. Results	15
4.1 <i>iMotions</i>	15
4.1.1 Summary of Dominant Emotional Reaction	16
4.1.2 Dove Advertisement	19
4.1.3 Rare Beauty Advertisement	20
4.1.4 Purchase Intentions	21
4.2 <i>Interview results</i>	21
4.2.1 Aggregate dimension 1: Emotional Branding Strategies	21
4.2.2 Aggregate Dimension 2: Emotional Responses.....	23
4.2.3 Aggregate dimension 3: Brand Perception	25
4.2.4 Aggregate dimension 4: Brand Loyalty	26
4.2.5 Aggregate dimension 5: Industry Specific Effectiveness	27

4.3 One - Word Descriptions	28
5. Discussion of the Findings	29
5.1 Individual patterns of Emotional Responses - Dove.....	32
5.2 Individual patterns of Emotional Responses – Rare Beauty.....	34
5.3 Integrating One - Word Descriptions	35
5.4 Theoretical Implications	37
5.5 Practical Implications	38
6.Conclusion.....	38
6.1 Limitations	40
6.2 Future Research Directions.....	40
References	41
Appendix	45
Appendix 1: Interview Guide	45
Appendix 2: R Script.....	48
R-script Dove	48
R-script Rare Beauty.....	49
R script Individual patterns of Emotional Responses - Dove	50
R script Individual patterns of Emotional Responses – Rare Beauty	52
Appendix 3: iMotions Results	54
Appendix 4: Figures	106
Appendix 5: Tables	107
Participants (P) Affective Responses to “Dove” and “Rare Beauty” Advertisements	107
Gioia Method	110
Appendix 6: Declaration.....	122

1. Introduction

The cosmetics industry is a highly competitive industry. Many competing brands offer similar and substitutable products. Therefore, it is important for brands to create strategies that stand out to differentiate themselves from their competition in order to be successful (Keller, 2001; Morrison & Crane, 2007). Branding is one frequently used strategy, through which brands try to create a unique image in the minds of the consumers (Ward et al., 2020). Within branding, one important approach is emotional branding. Emotional branding aims to establish long lasting bonds between consumers and the brands (Keller, 2001; Morrison & Crane, 2007).

Brands use emotional branding to go beyond aspects such as product performance and price because consumers are increasingly looking for brands that align with their personal values and emotions (Morrison & Crane, 2007). For this study, the cosmetic industry was selected because it is an industry where emotions can play an important role in consumers purchase decisions and consumers behavior. Consumers do not only purchase cosmetic products because of the functional benefits of the products themselves but also because they associate them with beauty, confidence, or individuality (Gabriel et al., 2021).

However, emotions are complex to study, as they are individual, influenced by personal preferences, cultural background, and demographic factors (Ekman, 1992). Furthermore, consumers have become more skeptical of inauthentic branding. Authenticity, trustworthiness, and shared values make the use of emotional branding strategies even more complex (Moulard et al., 2016). Therefore, it is necessary for brands to create emotionally meaningful and authentic interactions that resonate with their target audience, as this can lead to strong relationships and long-term success (Morrison & Crane, 2007).

To create emotional connections with their consumers, brands can make use of various emotional branding strategies such as storytelling, brand personality, and community building.

(Akgün et al., 2013; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). An example of emotional branding in the form of storytelling in the cosmetics industry is Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign. In this campaign, Dove features real women instead of models to highlight individual beauty, aiming to achieve authenticity and create a deeper emotional connection with consumers (Dove, n.d.).

Despite the increased use of emotional branding strategies, there are still some remaining challenges and knowledge gaps. Existing research points out the importance of emotional branding but often does not focus on the specific strategies such as storytelling and brand personality and how those affect consumer perception (Aaker, 1997; Woodside et al., 2008). Moreover, existing research often uses quantitative methods, but a qualitative approach might deliver more meaningful insights when it comes to revealing emotions and understanding consumers on a deeper level (Loraine et al., 2020).

By addressing these issues, this study aims to offer valuable insights into emotional branding and provide actionable recommendations that cosmetic brands can rely on to create stronger emotional connections with their consumers.

To understand the role of emotional branding in the cosmetics industry, the research question in this study is: *How do specific emotional branding strategies shape consumer perceptions and loyalty in the cosmetics industry?* Since there are several emotional branding strategies, this study will focus on two primary strategies, storytelling and brand personality. This focus will help to gain a deeper understanding of this topic. The purpose of this study is to find out how both of these strategies affect consumer loyalty and perception in the cosmetics industry. In addition to the main research question, three sub questions will be included to deepen this study even more.

- 1) *What roles do emotional branding strategies (storytelling and brand personality) play in evoking emotional responses among consumers?*

- 2) *How do emotional branding strategies (storytelling and brand personality) influence consumers perceptions of brand warmth, competence, and trustworthiness?*
- 3) *How do emotional branding strategies contribute to building long-term consumer loyalty in the cosmetics industry?*

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Emotional Branding

Emotional branding is a marketing strategy that aims to build an emotional connection between consumers and a brand, fostering trust and attachment that go beyond one-time purchases (Morrison & Crane, 2007). In industries with many similar products, such as the cosmetics industry, emotional branding can help brands stand out by connecting with consumers on a deeper level. Rather than competing only on product quality or price, brands seek to create meaningful experiences (Keller, 2001; Morrison & Crane, 2007). This approach can strengthen customer relationships at every stage of the customer journey, before, during, and after purchase, leading to competitive advantages (Keller, 2001).

Especially in the cosmetics industry, emotional branding can be powerful. Cosmetics are not just practical products, they are personal products that are associated with beauty, confidence, and identity. Consumers often buy cosmetic products to feel a certain way about themselves or to express something, and not only to fulfill a functional need (Gabriel et al., 2021). However, emotions are personal and culturally influenced. Therefore brands must be careful to be authentic in their strategies. If a campaign seems inauthentic, there is a risk that consumers may lose trust in the brand or their products (Morrison & Crane, 2007; Moulard et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2006). Authenticity in emotional branding means that the brand's messages are driven by intrinsic passion and unique values, rather than purely by profit motives, and that the brand shows this behavior consistently over time (Moulard et al., 2016).

In summary, emotional branding in cosmetics involves creating emotional experiences around beauty products to create a personal bond with consumers. In this study, the focus is on two primary emotional branding strategies, storytelling and brand personality.

Storytelling uses narratives to engage consumers, appealing to their emotions and shaping brand perception. Unlike traditional presentations of product facts or features, emotional stories create context that can be more memorable and convincing (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Storytelling can be transmitted through various formats such as text, images, and video, and across different channels, online as well as offline to communicate a consistent emotional message (He et al., 2021). For example, Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign uses storytelling. It narrates the theme of ordinary women overcoming beauty standards, thereby possibly invoking emotions of empowerment and joy as viewers might resonate with the authenticity and relatability of those stories (Gabriel et al., 2021; Morrison & Crane, 2007).

Brand personality refers to the set of human-like traits or characteristics that consumers associate with a brand. Just as people have different personalities that shape how others feel about them, brands can grow personalities through their marketing communications, design, and behavior (Aaker, 1997). Aaker's (1997) framework outlines five dimensions of brand personality: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. The dimensions are seen as followed:

- Sincerity: The brand is down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and has cheerful qualities
- Excitement: The brand is daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date
- Competence: The brand is reliable, intelligent, and successful
- Sophistication: the brand is upper-class and charming
- Ruggedness: The brand is outdoorsy and tough

For example, a sincere cosmetics brand may appear honest and caring, while one emphasizing competence may build trust through product effectiveness (Aaker, 1997; Swaminathan et al., 2009). When consumers perceive a brand's personality as aligning with their own self-image or aspirations, they are more likely to form strong emotional bonds. This is because brand personality humanizes the brand, making it easier for consumers to emotionally relate to it (Fournier, 1998; Swaminathan et al., 2009).

2.2 Emotional Responses to Emotional Branding

Emotional branding strategies aim to evoke emotional reactions in consumers that influence their attitudes and behaviors towards the brand (Gabriel et al., 2021; He et al., 2021; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Common emotional responses targeted by cosmetics brands include joy, love, trust, pride, nostalgia, and even empathy or inspiration, which can lead to deeper connection between consumers and brands (Gabriel et al., 2021).

According to emotion theory, there are basic emotions such as joy, surprise, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and contempt that humans universally recognize and experience. (Ekman, 1992). Emotional branding campaigns often aim to trigger positive basic emotions such as joy or surprise, while avoiding negative ones like anger or disgust (Gabriel et al., 2021; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). For example, a heartwarming advertisement might evoke joy and warmth. Joy is particularly powerful in cosmetics marketing since it can transfer feelings of happiness to consumers, who then associate those good feelings with the brand. Emotions like trust and love are often long-term outcomes of lasting emotional branding. For example, by repeatedly delivering sincere messaging, a brand can foster a sense of trust, an assurance that the brand is reliable and cares about the consumer's well-being. Over time, this can deepen into brand love or attachment (Moulard et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2006).

It is important to mention that emotional responses might act as mediators between branding strategies and brand outcomes. Thomson et al. (2005) argue that consumers' emotional attachments to brands, like feelings of love, connection, and passion, mediate the effect of brand experiences on loyalty behaviors such as repurchase and advocacy. In other words, emotional branding can first cause emotional responses, which then might lead to consumer loyalty. Therefore, emotional responses can be understood as a bridge that connects branding strategies to consumer perceptions (Thomson et al., 2005).

Crucially, positive emotional responses to branding can be linked to favorable brand perceptions. Research in consumer psychology shows that when an advertisement causes positive emotions, consumers are more likely to view the brand as warm, trustworthy, and competent, even if these traits are not explicitly communicated (Kervyn et al., 2012; Kim & Sullivan, 2019).

In the cosmetics context, feelings of joy or inspiration triggered by a campaign can make a brand appear more caring, which is associated with warmth, and capable which is associated with competence in the mind of consumer's (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Similarly, emotional responses of trust due to an authentic campaign can enhance perceptions of the brand's trustworthiness (Moulard et al., 2016)

Some key emotional responses relevant to cosmetics branding include the following:

- Joy is often triggered by uplifting or fun content and can increase brand likability (Kim & Sullivan, 2019).
- Trust builds through consistent, honest messaging and fosters a sense of security (Moulard et al., 2016).
- Love and affection focus on a deep emotional attachment to the brand, characterized by passion (Batra et al., 2012).

Overall, triggering emotional responses can be a crucial first step for emotional branding to influence consumer perception and loyalty.

2.3 Consumer Perceptions: Warmth, Competence, and Trustworthiness

When a brand successfully engages consumers emotionally, it can influence how consumers perceive the brand's personality. Three important perception dimensions in this context are warmth, competence, and trustworthiness. These dimensions align with concepts from social psychology's Stereotype Content Model, which proposes that people universally judge others, and by extension brands based on perceived warmth and competence. Warmth includes traits like kindness and sincerity, while competence includes traits such as capability, efficiency, and reliability. Trustworthiness is often considered part of the warmth dimension, as a warm person or brand is typically perceived as well-intentioned and honest (Kervyn et al., 2012).

In the cosmetics industry, warmth is often transferred through messages that include inclusivity, empathy, and empowerment (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). An example would be the Dove "Real Beauty" advertisements, which feature real, authentic women and mention the importance of self-love as previously mentioned. Dove tries to create an image of warmth and empathy, which might contribute to consumers seeing Dove as a kind and trustworthy brand (Gabriel et al., 2021)

Competence refers to the perception that a brand is effective, and capable of delivering what it promises (Kervyn et al., 2012). In the cosmetics industry, competence can be associated with the quality of products and the brand's expertise in cosmetics. Emotional branding can indirectly influence competence perceptions (Kim & Sullivan, 2019).

Moreover, competence is closely related to trust. Consumers need to trust that a brand can effectively deliver results (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Research shows that perceived

warmth and competence together can drive brand trust and purchase intentions (Kervyn et al., 2012).

Trust is built through honest and transparent communication as well as the perception that the brand acts in the consumer's best interests and is aiming for more than just profit (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). For example Rare Beauty promotes self-acceptance and donates one percent of their sales to mental health initiatives which might boost consumers trust in the brand's sincerity (Richardson, 2021)

It is important to mention that warmth, competence, and trustworthiness often co-occur in consumers' perceptions (Kervyn et al., 2012). Emotional branding efforts usually aim to simultaneously make the brand appear warm, competent, and trustworthy, to not only reach for short-term success but achieving enduring benefits (Kim & Sullivan, 2019)

These effects can also be interpreted through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Emotional branding can help meet these needs for example by promoting self-expression (autonomy), communicating expertise (competence), or fostering inclusive, relatable narratives (relatedness). When these needs are fulfilled, emotional engagement and brand loyalty become more likely.

2.4 Brand Loyalty and Emotional Attachment

Eventually, the goal of emotional branding in the cosmetics industry is to foster brand loyalty. Brand loyalty refers to consumers commitment to repurchase or continue using a brand's products, their resistance to switching to competitors, and their tendency to recommend the brand to others (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

One mechanism behind the connection between emotional branding and loyalty is through the concept of emotional attachment. When consumers develop a deep emotional attachment to a brand, they often perceive the brand as an extension of themselves or a relationship partner (Fournier, 1998). Emotional branding strategies, such as storytelling and a strong brand personality, can be helpful in building these emotional bonds (Morrison & Crane, 2007). Such attachments typically go beyond rational satisfaction and focus instead on how the brand makes consumers feel about themselves (Thomson et al., 2005)

Thomson et al. (2005) showed that consumers who feel strong emotional attachment to brands demonstrate greater loyalty and advocacy behaviors, even if minor product issues occur or the price increases.

It is important to distinguish between attitudinal loyalty, reflecting emotional commitment, and behavioral loyalty, reflecting repeat purchasing. Emotional branding primarily strengthens attitudinal loyalty, which often translates into behavior but only if product quality and customer satisfaction remain high (Oliver, 1999).

With the focus on previous research, emotional branding strategies are hypothesized to influence consumer behavior through a complex process. Specifically, emotional branding is assumed to evoke emotional responses such as joy, trust, excitement, or nostalgia (He et al., 2021; Kim & Sullivan, 2019), which then can shape consumers' perceptions of brand warmth, competence, and trustworthiness (Gabriel et al., 2021; Kervyn et al., 2012). A positive brand perception is associated with stronger emotional attachment and higher loyalty, such as repeat purchase behavior and advocacy (Moulard et al., 2016; Thomson et al., 2005)

For example, a cosmetics brand that employs storytelling to emphasize authenticity and empowerment might evoke emotions like pride and trust. These emotional responses can foster

perceptions of the brand as warm and capable, encouraging consumers to develop loyalty, which goes beyond the product satisfaction (Keller, 2001; Morrison & Crane, 2007)

While these links have been conceptually proposed and partially evidenced in previous studies, there remains a need for integrated empirical research examining the full chain starting from emotional branding strategies, going through emotional responses and brand perceptions to loyalty outcomes. Particularly in the cosmetics industry, there is a gap, which this study addresses by proposing the following conceptual framework.

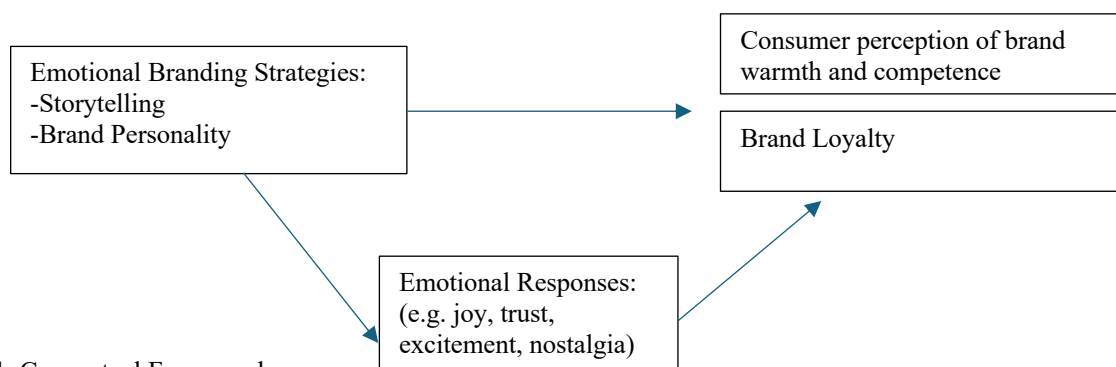


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework assumes that emotional branding strategies, such as storytelling and brand personality, influence consumers by first evoking emotional responses such as joy, trust, excitement, or nostalgia (He et al., 2021; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). These emotional responses function as mediators that transmit the effects of branding strategies to consumers' perceptions of brand warmth, competence, and trustworthiness (Gabriel et al., 2021; Kervyn et al., 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To investigate the role of emotional branding in shaping consumer perceptions and loyalty, this study employs a multi-method research design. It combines an experimental analysis with iMotions software and a follow-up semi-structured interview. By combining the iMotions data with in-depth interviews, the research captures both, the immediate emotional reactions and deeper insights of the participants. This mixed approach is well-suited to explore the research

question, as it allows researchers to see how emotional branding strategies impact participants in real time and helps to understand why and in what ways these experiences affect their perceptions and loyalty. Combining these methods strengthens the studies validity by offering both empirical data and rich, contextual insights (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The overall process consisted of two steps:

1. Emotional Analysis with iMotions:

Participants were exposed to selected video advertisements from cosmetics brands, which incorporate storytelling and brand personality elements. While watching, their facial expressions were tracked using iMotions, which captures real-time, emotional responses like joy, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, and engagement, based on Ekman, 1992. These measured emotions correspond to the “emotional response” stage of the conceptual framework and provide empirical data to assess the effectiveness of branding strategies in evoking emotions. The emotion analysis with iMotions, includes Affectiva’s AFFDEX SDK 5.1. This software uses AI trained on over 55,000 diverse videos from 90 countries and follows the Facial Action Coding System to detect emotional expressions. It shows high accuracy (91% on average) for core emotions such as joy, sadness, and anger, and also includes sentimentality and confusion. A key benefit of this method is that it provides continuous emotion tracking across time (iMotions, n.d.)

However, a limitation is that facial expressions may not always fully reflect a person’s internal emotional state, especially in social or restrained settings (Barrett et al., 2019). Therefore, in this study, iMotions data was supported by interviews to validate and interpret results. Engagement and valence were used only as secondary indicators to avoid overinterpreting non-emotional responses.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews:

Immediately after the viewing, participants took part in one-on-one interviews, where they first answered questions about emotional branding in general, and then reflected on their emotional reactions to the ads and discussed their perceptions of the brands and their willingness to engage with or stay loyal to those brands. These interviews provide insight into the “brand perception” and “brand loyalty” components of the framework

3.2 iMotions Stimuli Selection and Emotional Data Collection

For the iMotions analysis phase, two video advertisements were chosen as stimuli, each making use of emotional branding in the cosmetics industry. The links to the chosen stimuli can be found in the appendix (Appendix 1). One Dove advertisement from the “Real Beauty” campaign which focuses on storytelling and emphasizing authenticity, self-esteem, and warmth and a Rare Beauty advertisement which focusses on brand personality and value as well as emphasizing self-acceptance. A short description of the content within these advertisements can be found in the results section of this paper (see 4.1.2 and 4.1.3).

Each video was one to two minutes long. These particular brands and campaigns were selected because they notably feature emotional branding elements and align with the study’s focus on storytelling and brand personality. The Dove advertisement uses narrative storytelling, and the Rare Beauty advertisement focusses on the brand’s personality

During the viewing, participants were seated in a quiet room in the lab at the university. The iMotions Facial Expression Analysis (FEA) module was calibrated to each participant’s face before playing the advertisements. This software uses the device camera and advanced algorithms to detect facial muscle movements and code them into emotional states in real time (iMotions, 2024). Specifically, iMotions tracks the intensity of expressions corresponding to the seven basic emotions defined by Ekman (joy, surprise, anger, fear, sadness, disgust,

contempt). For example, a smile would register as joy/happiness, a furrowed brow as anger or confusion, a raised eyebrow as surprise, etc. The software outputs time series data and visualizations like emotion timelines, indicating the levels of each emotion experienced throughout the video. These outputs allow researchers to identify peaks in certain emotion (iMotions, 2024).

All emotional data were recorded and stored securely and anonymously. The use of such recording was approved by the university's ethics committee, and participants provided informed consent after being briefed about the procedure. They were aware that their facial reactions were being recorded for research purposes, and all agreed to proceed. The environment was controlled in terms of lighting and minimal distractions to ensure good quality.

3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

After watching the videos, each participant took part in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were designed to explore two main topics. First, the participants broader views on emotional branding strategies in cosmetics and how these influence their perception of brands and loyalty, and second, the participants personal perceptions and emotional reactions to the specific advertisements they just saw.

An interview guide (Appendix 1) was used to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for participants to express themselves. The questions were open-ended, encouraging participants to reflect and share stories or examples. The interviewer searched for details like which moments in the ads were most emotionally impactful, whether participants felt the brand's message was authentic, and how all this related to their willingness to support the brand.

Each interview lasted about 20 minutes, a duration chosen to gather rich insights without fatiguing the participant. The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, and participants often expanded on topics freely. All interviews were audio-recorded, with permission, and later transcribed for further analysis. Participants were assured of confidentiality.

3.4 Sample and Recruitment

The study used a sample of 13 participants. Most participants were required to regularly purchase or use cosmetics, broadly defined (makeup and/or skincare), to ensure the discussion would be relevant to their experiences. The number of around 15 participants was suggested through the literature, as qualitative research guidelines suggest that this range often allows for saturation of themes in a heterogeneous group. After 13 participants saturation was reached, meaning that additional participants did not provide additional insights. Therefore, data collection stopped after 13 participants (Guest et al., 2006).

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling via personal networks. To ensure a diverse sample, the recruitment aimed to include a mix of genders, and cultural backgrounds. Notably, while cosmetics are often marketed primarily towards women, male participants were included as well, since men also use products and can be subjects of emotional branding. Diversity was wanted because emotional responses and brand perceptions can be influenced by personal and cultural context (Gabriel et al., 2021; Kim & Sullivan, 2019).

All participants received an information sheet before participating. They were informed about the use of facial recording as well as the voice recording to ease the transcription process and were assured that data would be anonymized. They were also told they could withdraw at any time in the experiment as well as in the interview.

4. Results

4.1 iMotions

To explore participants' emotional responses to different branding strategies, facial expression data were collected using the iMotions software while participants viewed two video advertisements, one from Dove and one from Rare Beauty. The analyzed emotions included joy, sadness, disgust, fear, anger, surprise, confusion, and contempt, as well as the cognitive-affective dimensions of sentimentality and neutral expression. In addition, valence and engagement were tracked. Valence indicates the general positive or negative facial expression and engagement reveals attentional focus, neither of the two is considered a core emotion (iMotions, 2024). Therefore, these were used only as supportive co-indicators in the interpretation, but not treated as dominant emotional outcomes.

In the context of emotional branding and cosmetics advertising, emotions such as joy, sadness, and sentimentality are particularly relevant, as they are directly linked to consumer empathy, affective resonance, and positive brand associations (Gabriel et al., 2021; He et al., 2021; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Moreover, these emotions were most frequently and consistently detected across participants in both iMotions facial expression data and follow-up interviews, supporting their relevance as dominant affective reactions. Based on these findings, the focus in the results and the discussion is more shifted towards those affective reactions.

iMotions provided an Excel file containing all raw emotion data including timestamps for each participant. These data were first cleaned with help of the BMS Lab, which is the social science innovation lab at the University of Twente, to remove empty rows and incomplete data and prepare the dataset for further analysis. After data cleaning, the results were visualized using Rstudio, a data analysis environment for the programming language R, which allows for advanced statistical analysis and visualization (Appendix 2). Specifically, time-series plots

were created to examine emotional responses throughout the duration of each video. A detailed overview of the individual time-series emotion data is provided in Appendix 3.

4.1.1 Summary of Dominant Emotional Reaction

In order to have a structured overview, a summary table (Table 1) was developed. Within this table, the dominant affective reaction for each participant for each advertisement can be found. Additionally, the table presents relevant co-reactions per participant for each advertisement, and additional interview insights.

The combination of the facial expression data with the interview quotes helps to validate the findings and highlights where the facial reactions aligned or differed from the participants experience and feelings.

Participant	Dominant Affective Reaction (Dove)	Relevant Co-Reactions (Dove)	Interview Insights (Dove)	Dominant Affective Reaction (Rare Beauty)	Relevant Co-Reactions (Rare Beauty)	Interview Insights (Rare Beauty)
P1	Joy	Sentimentality: Frequent moderate-to-high peaks, especially between 20–90 seconds Surprise: A few strong spikes (e.g., around second 25 and 85) Fear Around second 30, when AI generated women appear Confusion: Repeatedly appear	Participant was asked, if any emotions were felt: <i>“In the beginning a bit of anger [...] in the end I felt some compassion for the kid and the woman but also felt happy for them.”</i>	Joy	Sentimentality: Notable peaks in second half	Participant was asked, if any emotions were felt: <i>“In the end [...] not really a feeling but it was nice to see all the different types of women smiling next to each other so maybe happy.”</i>
P2	Joy	Sentimentality: High peaks and frequent occurrences Surprise: A few sharp spikes around 40 seconds	<i>“I think when they show the real looking person, you could actually relate to, you feel kind of included.”</i>	Joy	None	<i>“Yes in the end. They show all the different women, and they all seemed confident in their own ways [...] Joy. I was happy while watching it.”</i>
P3	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>“I would say for the second part, bit happier, because at first they showed like perfect woman so that would get me down because</i>	Anger (low value but most dominant)	Joy: High value of joy towards the end of the video	<i>“No, this one less than the other one [...] but I think I liked this ad a little more than the first one, because it actually shows real people and how they feel,</i>

			<i>you're looking at something seen as perfect and think I'm not going to be like that. So you get a bit sad and down. And the second part is more like hey, those people are like me, they look happy with themselves, so I can be happy with myself too. "</i>			<i>and what makes them feel better. "</i>
P4	Joy	Sentimentality: Repeated peaks, especially around second 60 and 90 Contempt: Several high spikes	<i>"I was quite confused. At the beginning, because there was a lot of AI and I would say beauty standards that people mostly have, but then afterwards when all the diversity came into it was quite nice to see that they interpreted the beauty standard differently and more aligning with what is normal. "</i>	None / Flat emotional response	Joy: Present only in first and last few seconds	<i>"I don't know. I don't really feel much. It was a weird ad because I feel like it was a bit fake [...] I was confused by it, but I don't really think I felt any other emotions. "</i>
P5	Fear: Frequent and clearly higher than any other basic emotion	Surprise: Spike at around 20 seconds	<i>"I think maybe the part where they showed the billboard and then the woman with the kid looking at the billboard, I was happy. Other than that not really"</i>	None	None	<i>"Not specifically like it was nice to see all the women together, but I can't call out the specific emotion. "</i>
P6	Joy: Very high values in the second part of the video	Sentimentality	<i>"Because a lot of people were actually smiling, it gave off this feeling of happiness. You could see that they were happy with their bodies. "</i>	Joy	Sentimentality: Frequent low-to-moderate peaks throughout	<i>"I would say it make me feel happy because they were all cheering together or like posing and having fun. "</i>
P7	Joy	Contempt: Several high spikes Sentimentality: Repeated, high peaks especially at the beginning of the advertisement	<i>"It is quite unfortunate with seeing all these unrealistic</i>	Joy	Contempt: Multiple sharp spikes Sentimentality: High early peaks	<i>"I think it was nice [...] but for some reason it felt unauthentic</i>

			<i>beauty standards. So it did make me feel a bit sad. And then to see that Dove has a different look on beauty and tries to spread it was really nice.</i>			<i>like an actual ad.</i> <i>“Uncomfortable in a way, because it kind of felt like they were using emotional branding as a marketing tool instead of a connecting tool or an expressing tool.”</i>
P8	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>“I think when I first saw the perfect woman, I felt a bit maybe self-conscious. Automatically comparing myself to them a little bit and seeing the beauty standards and then. And then the second part was really almost relieving.”</i>	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>“To be honest, not really.”</i>
P9	Joy Very high values in the second part of the video; No joy in the first part	Contempt: Several high spikes Sentimentality: Repeated peaks	<i>“The beginning made me a bit sad but then the second part made me relieved or happy maybe also more comfortable.”</i>	Joy	Contempt: Two major peaks	<i>“I was quite happy through the whole advertisement because they used very cool colors, and everyone was laughing all the time it was very dynamic, but I think emotional itself not really.”</i>
P10	Joy: very strong spike up to 100 midway through the video; it's brief, it's the highest emotional responses	None	<i>“I think it was more when there was a woman and a child. I was like, oh, cute. At the beginning I was a bit confused when they showed the AI pictures.”</i>	None	Joy: Only high at the beginning and towards the end	<i>“Maybe the first part made me happy because it was with fun colors and beautiful people, but I am not sure if it was emotional like that.”</i>
P11	Joy: Only at the beginning and towards the end otherwise none/flat emotional responses	Sentimentality: Present towards the end	<i>“Not really. I couldn't really relate to what they showed.”</i>	None	Joy: Although only present at the beginning	<i>“Not really. It was nice to watch but no emotions.”</i>
P12	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>“No, I just like the message. It's just, nice. But then I wasn't really</i>	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>“I guess maybe a little, seeing the black girl definitely helped. I was happy. And she even had an</i>

			<i>touched or anything.”</i>			<i>African accent. She didn't have an American accent, which is what most brands do. They want to be diverse but don't do it authentically”</i>
P13	Joy	Sentimentality: Repeated peaks with higher peaks in the beginning of the video	<i>“I definitely felt a sense of joy and satisfaction while watching the ad. It gave me the impression that they're genuinely trying to reflect what daily life looks like for everyone, while staying true to their values.”</i>	Joy	Sentimentality	<i>“Emotionally, what stood out to me the most was the moment when everyone smiled and seemed so happy and giggly, I really liked that.”</i>

Table 1
Participants (P) Affective Responses to the Dove and Rare Beauty Advertisements

4.1.2 Dove Advertisement

The Dove advertisement was part of the “Real Beauty” campaign and followed a storytelling structure. It contrasted unrealistic beauty ideals with more inclusive representations using AI-generated images. In the first part of the video, a woman types in prompts such as “most beautiful women” or “perfect skin” into an AI tool to generate outcomes, these result in stereotypical and homogeneous images. In the second part, when the same prompts included the Dove brand name, the generated images change dramatically to show a diverse range of women, transferring a message of authenticity and self-acceptance.

The iMotions data showed that most participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P13) revealed joy as the dominant emotional reaction. Particularly during the second half of the video after the 60th second some participants showed the emotions of joy at a high level. Participant 6,7, and 9 revealed joy as their dominant affective reaction but it remained at a lower value in the first minute of the advertisement and rapidly increased at the 60-second mark. This marks

the turning point of the advertisement, where the prompts include the Dove name and result in a diverse range of women.

A similar pattern can be seen in Participant 11's reaction. Participant 11 also showed joy as the dominant affective reaction, but it only reaches high values close to 100 towards the last 30 seconds of the video, which include a variety of diverse women. Notably, Participant 10 showed a neutral facial expression through the whole advertisement, and only had one peak at around the turning point around the 60th second.

Remarkably, Participant 5 showed a spike in sadness around the 30th second mark, which is corresponding to the moment the advertisement where an AI-generated women is shown.

4.1.3 Rare Beauty Advertisement

The Rare Beauty advertisement focused on brand personality and values such as individuality, self-worth, and emotional well-being. The advertisement featured a range of diverse women and emphasized Rare Beauty's mission of inclusivity, with scenes highlighting self-acceptance and the idea of being "rare". In contrast to Dove, the narrative structure was more abstract and less linear.

The advertisement elicited a more neutral emotional pattern overall. Participants such as P3, P4, P5, P8, P10, P11, and P12 displayed mostly neutral expressions throughout the video. Emotional peaks, typically joy or sentimentality, were shorter and less intense, and were observed in participants like P1, P2, P6, P7, P9, and P13 during scenes featuring diversity and self-empowerment messages. Participant 13 displayed elevated joy and engagement during the middle and end of the video, particularly when the message of individual beauty was made explicit.

4.1.4 Purchase Intentions

After viewing each video, participants rated their likelihood of purchasing a product from the brand on a 5-point Likert scale. The Dove advertisement received a higher average score ($M = 3.75$) compared to Rare Beauty ($M = 2.73$).

4.2 Interview results

The interviews were first transcribed in order to apply the Gioia Methodology. This method is a systematic approach to qualitative research that emphasizes rigor and transparency. It is particularly well-suited for exploring complex phenomena. The analysis process begins with identifying first-order concepts resulting closely from the participants own words. These concepts are then grouped into second-order themes that reflect more abstract, theoretical patterns. Finally, both levels are integrated into aggregate dimensions that capture the core insights of the data (Gioia et al., 2012). A full overview about the Gioia procedure can be found in the appendix (Appendix 5).

The analysis revealed five key dimensions: Emotional Branding Strategies, Emotional Responses, Brand Perception, Brand Loyalty, and Industry- Specific Observation.

4.2.1 Aggregate dimension 1: Emotional Branding Strategies

This dimension describes how brands attempt to establish emotional bonds with consumers through a combination of focused communication, narrative, and identity-driven messaging. It includes five second-order themes: Emphasizing Customer Care & Values, Emotional Storytelling & Narrative, Relatable, Personalized Content, Inclusive & Empowering Messaging, and Balanced Emotional Branding.

A consistent finding across interviews was that participants responded positively to brands that delivered genuine care and honesty. The theme Emphasizing Customer Care & Values captures this response, as participants valued brands that acted with consideration and expressed shared

values such as sustainability, animal protection, and inclusivity. Participant 1 noted: *“They’re trying to communicate that they somehow care about their customers and not only sell products [...] It’s positive.”* Similarly, others described feeling drawn to brands that demonstrated care through behavior and communication, including prominent figures like Selena Gomez or Rihanna, who were praised for authentically putting themselves in the shoes of their customers.

A second theme, Emotional Storytelling & Narrative, reflects the power of narrative to engage consumers. Participants frequently reported stronger emotional connections with brands that included storytelling in their advertisements. These stories were seen as making products more than just products. They created context and emotional relevance. As Participant 4 explained: *“It makes the product more than just a product. So you feel more connected to the product because you heard a story.”* Emotional storytelling was especially effective when it featured vulnerable or personally relatable experiences. Brands that told stories with emotional depth were perceived as more human and sincere.

The theme of Relatable, Personalized Content further supports this, as participants emphasized how emotional branding resonated more when the content reflected their own life experiences. For example Participant 11 said: *“I think if I can connect it to my own personal life, if it resembles personal experience, I think it can affect you more.”* Advertisements that included emotions or situations from daily life were especially powerful in making participants feel understood and included.

Inclusive & Empowering Messaging was another important theme, especially in the context of diversity and representation in advertising. Many participants appreciated brand efforts to show a wide range of body types, ethnicities, and gender identities. However, the impact of this messaging depended heavily on authenticity. While some found empowerment messages uplifting, others criticized them as repetitive or dishonest. As participant 12 noted, *“It’s not*

bad, but the same thing [...] maybe there are other ways they could stand out instead of using the same message.”

Lastly, the theme Balanced Emotional Branding captures participants’ preference for emotional messaging that is included but at the same time not overwhelming. Emotional content needed to feel natural, not manipulative. *“If it's too over the top on the emotion part then it kind of takes away focus from the product,”* participant 10 pointed out. Others emphasized that emotional messaging is most effective when it supports, rather than replaces product information.

4.2.2 Aggregate Dimension 2: Emotional Responses

The second aggregate dimension that emerged from the data is Emotional Responses, which refers to how participants emotionally reacted to emotional branding content. These reactions included both positive and empowering effects, as well as more reflective or skeptical views. The dimension includes three main second-order themes: Feeling Included & Empowered by Representation, Positive Emotional Resonance, and Skepticism and Rational Detachment.

Participants frequently reported feeling emotionally impacted when advertisements featured individuals who looked like them or shared their everyday realities. Representation played a critical role in shaping feelings of inclusion and comfort. Participant 2 was asked what the advertisement evoked and expressed: *“I would say included because I finally saw people that kind of look like me. [...] I like that.”* Others described relief and uplift when brands challenged traditional beauty norms as for example in the Dove advertisement Participant 3 said: *“The second part is more like: ‘ hey, those people are like me [...] they look happy with themselves, so I can be happy with myself too.’”* These moments of recognition often led to emotional relief or validation, especially in contrast to the negative emotions evoked by unrealistic portrayals in the earlier parts of the advertisement. Participants noted that seeing authentic, diverse portrayals

of people led to feelings of emotional safety, empathy, and even pride. Participant 3 explained. *“It made me feel more comfortable because they seemed real.”*

Beyond representation, many participants described emotional branding as influencing them on a subconscious level. This theme captures the emotional resonance that builds brand likeability, memorability, and deeper engagement. An example is Participant 5’s statement: *“Since it involves people, and people even subconsciously are affected by seeing emotions, it has a real impact.”* Similarly, others admitted to feeling emotionally drawn to brands without fully realizing it at first. As Participant 8 mentioned: *“I’m very prone to emotional things, so I think it does something with me unconsciously.”*

These emotional responses were also linked to message relevance. When a message felt personal, it was more likely to foster emotional engagement. This can be seen in Participant 9’s statement: *“If the message resonates with me, I get more interested to actually watch the ad.”* Participants such as Participant 8 described feeling more inclined to trust or remember a brand when emotional connections were established: *“You automatically feel sympathetic toward the brand and maybe remember it better.”*

Despite these positive effects, several participants also showed skepticism. This theme of skepticism and rational detachment highlights how some consumers questioned the sincerity behind emotional branding. Participant 12 said: *“I have a general distrust for brands because I always know that behind this, there are a bunch of copywriters and a lot of people with nice words and stories.”* Others such as Participant 5 reported critically distancing themselves from emotional tactics: *“I can look at brands without directly being influenced.”*

Importantly, even those who acknowledged subconscious emotional influence often confirmed the importance of product quality in decision-making. For example Participant 3 mentioned: *“For me it is more like, what’s the quality behind it?”* Likewise Participant 1 explained: *“I*

usually don't take my emotions into consideration when buying a product and think more rationally.”

4.2.3 Aggregate dimension 3: Brand Perception

The third aggregate dimension, Brand Perception, refers to how the participants judged cosmetic brands after seeing emotional branding. Instead of just reacting emotionally, they thought about what the brand message meant, how sincere it felt, how relevant it was, and used this to form their opinion about the brand. This dimension includes the second-order themes of Authentic Execution, Memory and Brand Attention, and Product Value Over Emotional Appeal.

A key criterion for positive brand perception was whether emotional messaging was perceived as genuine or staged. Participants expressed a desire for authenticity in branding, particularly when it involved emotional themes such as diversity or empowerment. Participant 3 said: *“It has to look genuine, not staged.”* Several participants noted that emotional themes sometimes appeared less genuine, particularly when they felt brands used such themes primarily as marketing instruments rather than as sincere expressions of their values. For example Participant 7 said: *“Maybe just uncomfortable [...] it kind of felt like they were using emotional branding as a marketing tool instead of a connecting tool,”* when the participant was asked what the Rare Beauty advertisement evoked.

Participants were more open when diversity was portrayed with attention to detail and cultural accuracy. For example, Participant 12 noted: *“She didn’t have an American accent, which is what most brands do. They want to be diverse but don’t do it authentically. So that did feel very authentic to me.”* This quote referred to a woman of color speaking with an African accent in the Rare Beauty advertisement, which the participant perceived as a more realistic and credible representation. Similarly, advertisements that represented relatable, everyday life situations

rather than aspirational fantasies were described as more trustworthy and convincing as Participant 13 mentioned: *“If an ad shows a lifestyle that feels out of reach, it might make you question whether you even need the product.”*

Emotional branding also influenced participants’ perceptions through its impact on memory and attention. Advertisements that incorporated storytelling or intense emotional indications were more likely to be remembered, even when the participant did not intend to recall them, as mentioned by Participant 12: *“You notice the brand a bit more [...] the fact that you take note of the brand more is probably what makes you maybe even unintentionally buy.”*

Others such as Participant 4 reflected on how emotional messages stayed more effectively than rational content: *“Probably not directly caring about it, but I think it’s sticking more into your head when it’s more emotional and there is a story behind it.”*

Despite recognizing emotional branding’s effects, many participants placed high importance on the product’s actual functionality and performance. Several, like Participant 6 noted that while emotions might trigger attention or curiosity, their final brand preference was attached in product quality: *“For me the product should suit the things I want. Not necessarily emotions, more like what the product benefits me.”* Others, like Participant 13 expressed that while they appreciated emotional storytelling, it did not outweigh their rational evaluation: *“I wouldn’t say that’s the first thing my mind goes to [...] when I’m not faced with the brand and it’s just the product, I care more about quality.”*

4.2.4 Aggregate dimension 4: Brand Loyalty

The fourth aggregate dimension that emerged from the data is Brand Loyalty, which captures the conditions under which emotional branding leads to lasting customer commitment. Participants revealed that while emotional branding can spark interest or initial purchases, product performance and personal values play a crucial role in maintaining loyalty over time.

Many participants emphasized that although emotional branding could influence their perception or curiosity, it was ultimately the product quality that determined repeat purchases. For instance, Participant 6 explained: *“If a product does what it’s supposed to do, then I’m more likely to buy it.”* and added, *“I wouldn’t say it’s only emotional branding that influences me. It’s a mix.”*

Price sensitivity also played an important role as Participant 6 mentioned: *“Usually, I look at the price. As a student, I don’t have much money, so I don’t use high-end products.”* Across interviews, emotional appeal was described as secondary to functionality, quality, and affordability when it came to loyalty.

However, for many, loyalty was also shaped by a sense of shared values and perceived authenticity. Participants were more likely to stay loyal to brands that aligned with their ethics, such as being cruelty-free, inclusive, or transparent. Participant 9 shared: *“I do want the brand I buy products from to align with my values [...] even if they are hyped or have good branding, if it’s not aligning with my values at all, I will not buy them.”*

Others described strong loyalty experiences triggered by personal emotional gestures. Participant 3 shared a story not related to cosmetics: *“One friend said [...]the brand sent flowers after their dog died [...] those people will never go to another brand.”* In these cases, emotional connections that felt genuinely caring supported a deeper bond.

4.2.5 Aggregate dimension 5: Industry Specific Effectiveness

In addition to emotional branding in general, participants made industry-specific statements about where and how such branding strategies work best. Across interviews, it became clear that emotional branding is perceived as particularly effective in personal, appearance-related, and saturated markets, such as cosmetics and fashion.

Participants consistently noted that emotional branding seemed more relevant and impactful in industries where products are tied to self-expression and personal identity. Participant 2 explained: *“I feel like for makeup, it's a little more personal. [...] That's the same with clothes, you can express yourself. So I would say it probably works better in those industries.”* These categories were contrasted with utilitarian industries like steel or manufacturing, where emotional resonance was seen as harder to achieve or less appropriate, as mentioned by Participant 7: *“With, for example, the steel industry, they want more reliance and compliance. For cosmetic industry, it's such a saturated market [...] emotional branding would be a stronger tool to differentiate.”*

Emotional branding was also described as easier to implement in cosmetics due to the emotional language already associated with beauty and appearance. Participants such as Participant 12 believed that the usefulness of emotionally resonant language, imagery, and identity-related values in the beauty industry made it especially suitable for emotionally charged advertising: *“There are more choices of words that can help to touch the consumer. It is more personal.”*

Another key point was the role of market saturation. When many products were perceived to be of similar price and quality, emotional branding became a key differentiator. As Participant 7 said: *“So what makes it stand out is how they connect to the person.”*

4.3 One - Word Descriptions

Towards the end of the interviews, participants were asked to describe each advertisement in one word. These one-word descriptions provide an immediate affective view of each participant's impression and allow for comparison with the iMotions results.

For the Dove advertisement, participants mentioned predominantly positive descriptions, such as “hope” (P1), “comfortable” (P4, P9), “calm” (P5, P10), “individual” (P6), “sentimental” (P8), “genuine” (P13), and “interesting” (P12). Only one participant (P11) described the ad as

“confusing.” These responses align with the iMotions data, which showed joy and sentimentality as dominant responses in the second half of the advertisement.

For the Rare Beauty advertisement, responses were more varied. Positive descriptions included “happy” and “colorful” (P10), “included” (P2, P9), “connected” (P13), and “special” (P6). Other participants used more neutral or uncertain terms such as “confused” (P1, P4), “neutral” (P8), or “surprised” (P11). These differences will be further interpreted in the discussion (see Section 5.4).

5. Discussion of the Findings

This study aimed to examine how emotional branding strategies, specifically storytelling and brand personality influence emotional responses, brands perception and lastly consumer loyalty in the cosmetics industry. The created conceptual framework suggested a mediating role of emotional responses between emotional branding strategies and the outcomes such as brand warmth, competence, and loyalty. The findings in this study generally support this model but also reveal important framework conditions.

The findings from both iMotions and interviews confirm that emotional branding strategies can indeed evoke emotional reactions. In particular, the Dove advertisement, which used structured storytelling and highlighted authenticity, inclusivity, and empowerment, triggered significantly stronger emotional responses such as joy, engagement, and sentimentality. This was especially notable in the time-series plots, where some participants showed emotional peaks around and after the 60th second, where the stereotypical beauty ideals were contrasted with more realistic ones (e.g. P1, P6, P7, P9, P10). This also corresponded with the interview responses of some participant. For instance Participant 3 shared: *“The second part is more like: ‘hey, those people are like me, they look happy with themselves, so I can be happy with myself too.’”* Participant 3 also mentioned: *“Made me feel also more comfortable because they seemed real.”* It is

important to mention, that this participant did not show any dominant facial expressions in the iMotions data, even though their words suggest a clear emotional reaction. This highlights a limitation of this methodology, since it shows that facial expression analysis does not always capture what is truly felt.

This aligns with the theoretical assumption that emotional branding strategies influence consumers most effectively when they feel authentic and personally relevant (Morrison & Crane, 2007; Moulard et al., 2016). Emotions arise through a process of cognitive evaluation, meaning that consumers must first make sense of the message before they can respond emotionally (Lazarus, 1991). This could explain why the Rare Beauty advertisement, which relied more on brand personality, triggered weaker reactions. The advertisements' structure may have reduced cognitive engagement, limiting emotional activation. For instance, Participants 1 and 4 mentioned that they felt *"confused"* while watching the Rare Beauty advertisement. Interestingly, Participant 1 also showed high levels of confusion during the Dove advertisement, particularly in the first half, when the message relied on AI-generated images and the brand was not yet revealed. Participant 1 said: *"I'm not sure that if I wouldn't know the brand, I wouldn't know what the point of this ad is."* This suggests that even effective emotional branding may initially fail to connect if the narrative structure lacks clarity. However, as the Dove advertisement progressed, confusion decreased, and joy or sentimentality became dominant.

Participants found storytelling more emotionally engaging and personally relevant. For example Participant 4 mentioned: *"it makes the product more than just a product. So you feel more connected to the product because you heard a story"*, when it came to storytelling and Participant 11 mentioned *"If I can connect it to my own personal life, if it resembles personal experience, I think it can affect you more."* These quotes support the idea that emotional branding becomes more powerful when it connects to authentic live experiences, validating the

role of narrative depth and also supporting the relatedness component of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The results also show that emotional branding can backfire or lose impact if it is not authentic. For example, participant 7 felt uncomfortable during the Rare Beauty advertisement: *“uncomfortable in a way, because it kind of felt like they were using emotional branding as a marketing tool instead of a connecting tool or an expressing tool.”* Additionally, participant 3 said emotional branding has to be genuine: *“it has to look genuine, not staged.”* Those insights highlight authenticity as a critical success factor for emotional branding.

The results confirm that emotional responses play a role in shaping how consumers perceive brand personality traits such as warmth, competence, and trustworthiness. For both advertisements but especially for Dove one, participants perceived the advertisement as authentic, sincere and value driven. In the literature, these traits are often associated with brand warmth such as in the Stereotype Content Model (Kervyn et al., 2012). Participants also frequently mentioned memory and attention. For example, Participant 12 mentioned: *“you notice the brand a bit more and so the fact that you take note of the brand more is probably what makes you maybe even unintentionally buy the thing.”* However, emotional impression alone is not sufficient to shape long-term perception and loyalty. As already discussed, authenticity plays a crucial role.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that emotional branding can support attitudinal loyalty, such as emotional attachment (Oliver, 1999). However, behavioral loyalty such as for example repeatedly purchasing from a brand was often linked to functional expectations such as the price, product quality, and the product performance. Participant 6 for example said: *“If a product does what it’s supposed to do, then I’m more likely to buy it.”* Still, it is important that brand values align with the target audience. This alignment can be seen as a secondary factor when it comes to purchase decisions. Participant 9 mentioned: *“I do want the brand that I buy*

products from to align with my values[...]I just don't support brands that do animal testing[...]even if they are hyped or have good branding[...] if it's not aligning with my values at all I will not buy them.” These insights reveal that emotional branding may not be the only trigger that can influence loyalty but can be seen as. Mechanism that influences initial interest, while functional aspects ultimately drive repeat purchases. This can also be seen in the statement from Participant 9: *“I would not say that it increases my trust in the brand all the time[...] maybe the branding will make me try their products in the 1st place[...] but they have to be good for me to buy it [...] it does not really influence my trust it has to be a good product itself [...] it might influence the way I am more open to try it out.”*

Participants pointed out that emotional branding is particularly effective in the cosmetics industry, where products are often associated to identity, confidence, and self-expression. For example participant 2 said: *“For makeup, it's a little more personal. [...] That's the same with clothes [...] you can express yourself.”* Participant 11 also contrasted the industry to other industries: *“for example, the steel industry, they want more reliance and compliance and for cosmetic industry, it's such a saturated market that I think it would be a stronger tool to differentiate your brand from others.”* This supports the idea of brands using emotional branding in order to differentiate themselves from each other (Morrison & Crane, 2007).

5.1 Individual patterns of Emotional Responses - Dove

To deepen the analysis of emotional branding effects, the emotional response patterns of three selected participants (P9, P12, and P13) from the iMotions analysis, as well as the interviews were compared. These three participants were selected, because their emotional response patterns of joy have been contrasting during the Dove advertisement (Figure 2). This comparison can help to understand how the same branding strategy can lead to different consumer experiences.

Participant 13 shows a high level of joy throughout most of the advertisement. This was aligning with the interview insights. The Participant expressed strong alignment with the brands values: *“I definitely felt a sense of joy and satisfaction while watching the ad”* or *“I also appreciated that the ad didn’t just focus on a younger audience. They included more mature women and showcased different skin textures, skin tones, and types of beauty. I think that reflects a strong and meaningful value, which really resonates with me.”*

In comparison Participant 9 showed no joy at the beginning. Joy only emerged towards the middle to the end of the advertisement, after the message was revealed. This can be explained with the interview insights as the Participant shared: *“I think in the beginning of the video I got a bit sad because [...]you automatically compare it to yourself but when I saw the twist of the advertisement [...] I would say [I was] relieved and also happy because it is more similar to the way I know people and I am also myself.”* The expressed sadness was not captured through the iMotions software, however, the increase of joy was very clear.

Participant 12 showed a flat joy line and only a neutral facial expression through the whole advertisement. The interview insights also confirmed this absence. Regarding the advertisement the participant mentioned: *“It's just, nice but [...] I wasn't really touched”* Unlike Participant 9 and 13 who felt represented and liked the message Participant 12 was not emotionally attached and also expressed skepticism towards brands: *“I have a general distrust for brands“*

These contrasts show that the same advertisement can evoke different responses depending on the individual perceptions, expectations and general character traits.

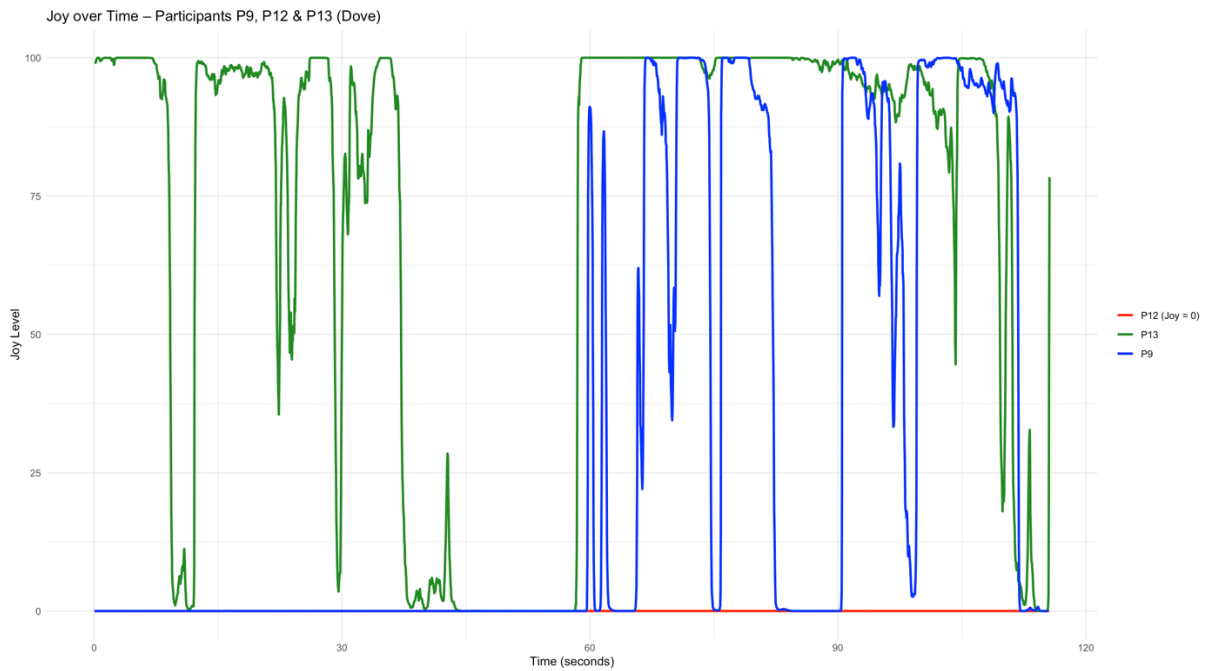


Figure 2. Joy over Time (0–120s) for Participants P9 (blue), P12 (red), and P13 (green) during the Dove Advertisement.

5.2 Individual patterns of Emotional Responses – Rare Beauty

While the Dove advertisement evoked stronger and more consistent emotional engagement especially when it comes to the emotion joy, the Rare Beauty advertisement revealed more unexpected responses. To explore the differences, a second comparison was conducted between Participant 6 and 7.

Participant 7 showed high values of joy throughout most parts of the advertisement. However, these iMotions insights are not aligning with the insights from the interview. In the interview, Participant 7 revealed discomfort and skepticism towards the emotional branding approach: *“It kind of felt like they were using emotional branding as a marketing tool instead of a connecting tool.”* and *“It felt unauthentic [...] like an actual ad”* proofing the discomfort. This shows that the emotional reactions in iMotions, do not necessarily translate to positive perception as it would have been expected to be positive if the levels of joy are high.

In comparison, Participant 6 showed later and lower values of joy throughout the advertisement but the interview insights were much more positive and aligning with what the iMotions data revealed: *“Somehow I would say it made me feel happy because they were all cheering together or like posing and having fun”* and *“If I were in a store, like Douglas or somewhere and saw that brand next to another one, I might be more likely to take a look.”*

This comparison reveals the complexity between the data from facial expression and subjective emotional experience. Although Participant 7 showed high values of joy according to iMotions, the interview revealed the opposite, it revealed discomfort and skepticism. Participant 6 shows weaker levels of joy, but only reported positive feelings in the interview. Therefore, data from facial expression analysis should always be interpreted carefully and in combination with qualitative data.

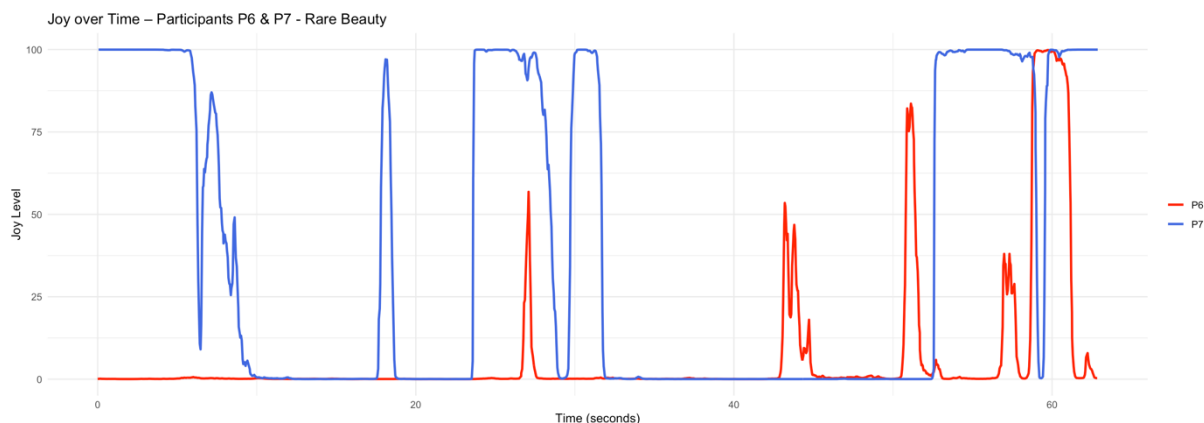


Figure 3. Joy over Time (0–65s) for Participants P7 (blue), and P6 (red) during the Rare Beauty Advertisement.

5.3 Integrating One - Word Descriptions

The one-word descriptions discussed in Section 4.3 serve as intuitive affective summaries. These spontaneous reactions reflect immediate emotional impressions that are less filtered by rational evaluation and therefore highlight the affective impact of branding strategies.

For the Dove advertisement, participants' descriptions (see Section 4.3) aligned strongly with the emotional patterns captured in the iMotions time-series. For instance, Participant 6, who used terms like *“individual”* and *“unique,”* exhibited a noticeable rise in joy beginning around

the midpoint of the advertisement. In the interview, the participant explained: *“Because a lot of people were actually smiling, it gave off this feeling of happiness.”* Likewise, Participant 13, who labeled the ad *“genuine,”* showed repeated sentimentality peaks and stated: *“I definitely felt a sense of joy and satisfaction while watching the ad.”* These examples illustrate emotional coherence across all measured insights.

In contrast, the Rare Beauty advertisement produced more fragmented impressions. Participants used both positive and negative descriptions (see 4.3), reflecting a lack of emotional clarity. Participant 7, for example, showed strong joy peaks but described the ad as *“unauthentic,”* Their one-word response *“inclusivity”* stood in contrast to their verbally communicated discomfort, showing a gap between intuitive labeling and actual emotional resonance.

Participant 12 also demonstrated this conflict. Although they recognized representation in the advertisement: *“It was cool to see because I felt represented for once”* their iMotions data remained flat, and the participant admitted: *“I wasn’t really touched.”* This case shows how cognitive appreciation of representation may not always lead to measurable emotional awakening.

Beyond emotional coherence, the one-word descriptions also offer insight into how participants perceived brand personality traits (Aaker, 1997). Terms such as *“genuine”* (P13) and *“individual”* (P6) align with the dimension of sincerity, while words like *“colorful”* (P10) reflect traits associated with excitement. In contrast, descriptors like *“confused”* (P1, P4) or *“unauthentic”* (P7) point to a breakdown in perceived sincerity or coherence, which may have undermined the effectiveness of the emotional branding strategy. These associations show that emotional branding is most impactful when brand personality traits, emotional responses, and perceived authenticity are in alignment. In this regard, the Dove campaign achieved greater consistency across all dimensions, while Rare Beauty faced greater variation in how its emotional and brand personality cues were interpreted.

This variance in emotional resonance was also reflected in participants' self-reported purchase intentions. After viewing the videos, participants rated their likelihood of purchasing from each brand. The Dove advertisement received a notably higher average score ($M = 3.75$) compared to Rare Beauty ($M = 2.73$). This suggests that emotionally coherent and authentic messaging not only improves emotional response and perception but can also increase behavioral intention to engage with the brand.

5.4 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of emotional branding by demonstrating the dynamic interplay between branding strategies, emotional responses, and consumer outcomes such as perception and loyalty.

A key theoretical contribution lies in the observation that emotional branding does not operate in isolation but is subject to framework conditions such as authenticity and individual relevance.

As supported by Lazarus (1991), emotions emerge through cognitive evaluations of stimuli. This implies that brand messages must be not only emotionally charged but also cognitively meaningful to generate strong responses. The weaker emotional resonance of the Rare Beauty advertisement, despite aligned values, illustrates the importance of narrative structures.

Additionally, this research supports and extends findings from Verduyn et al. (2009), showing that emotional experiences are time-sensitive and fluctuating. Emotional responses to branding were shown to peak at specific moments, aligning with the idea of “emotional intensity profiles” (Verduyn et al., 2009).

Lastly, this study adds nuance to the application of brand personality theory (Aaker, 1997) by demonstrating that personality traits like sincerity or competence may only translate into perception outcomes when emotional engagement and authenticity are present. These findings

underscore the importance of treating emotional branding not just as a strategy, but as an interactional process, shaped by consumer interpretation.

5.5 Practical Implications

For brands, especially in the cosmetics sector this study offers several actionable insights grounded in empirical evidence.

First, the findings emphasize the importance of authenticity in emotional storytelling. Consumers reacted more favorably to messages that carried genuine care and shared values, particularly when communicated through emotionally relatable narratives. Branding campaigns that make use of emotions should therefore focus on creating realistic and value-driven storytelling.

Second, emotional branding strategies should try for personal relevance. Participants felt more emotionally connected when they could identify with the content, such as diverse representations of real people, relatable experiences, or emotional narratives. Brands should tailor their content to specific target audiences.

Third, emotional connection alone is not enough to ensure long-term loyalty. Many participants underscored the importance of product performance, price, and practical benefits suggesting that emotional branding should complement rather than replace rational product messaging.

Finally, due to dynamic and fluctuating nature of emotional responses (Verduyn et al., 2009) brands should reinforce emotional narratives across multiple customer touchpoints. A single emotional advertisement may generate short-term attention, but consistent and authentic communication is needed to maintain deeper consumer relationships over time.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study aimed to explore how emotional branding strategies, specifically

storytelling and brand personality shape emotional responses, brand perceptions, and consumer loyalty within the cosmetics industry. A mixed-method approach that combined iMotions with in-depth semi-structured interviews, the study offers empirical and contextual insights into how consumers interpret and react to emotionally driven branding approaches.

The main research question for this study was: *How do specific emotional branding strategies shape consumer perceptions and loyalty in the cosmetics industry?*

The findings show that emotional branding can influence consumer perceptions and loyalty, but its effectiveness is dependent on perceived authenticity, personal relevance, and emotional coherence. When these conditions are met, emotional branding can foster emotional responses such as joy, or trust, which in turn consumers' brand perceptions of warmth, competence, and trustworthiness. However, emotional branding alone does not guarantee long-term loyalty. Factors such as product performance, price, and value alignment play a crucial role.

The first sub question was: *What roles do storytelling and brand personality play in evoking emotional responses?*

Storytelling appeared as a stronger emotional trigger than brand personality. Structured, relatable narratives, such as those seen in Dove's campaign evoked more intense and consistent emotional responses. Brand personality only fostered emotion when it was clearly communicated and perceived as authentic.

The second sub question was: *How do these strategies influence perceptions of warmth, competence, and trustworthiness?*

Emotional branding, particularly when it was perceived authentic led to increased perceptions of brand warmth and competence as seen as the emotional response of joy. When consumers experienced the emotional messages as sincere, they were more likely to trust the brand. However, signs of inauthenticity or overused messaging reduced the perceived trustworthiness.

The third sub question was: *How do emotional branding strategies contribute to consumer loyalty?*

This study found that emotional branding supports attitudinal loyalty, such as emotional attachment or value alignment. However, for behavioral loyalty which includes repeat purchases from the same brand, consumers still prioritize functionality, pricing, and credibility. Emotional branding was seen as a valuable addition, but not a substitute.

6.1 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 13 participants, while appropriate for qualitative insight and theoretical saturation, limits generalizability. For the qualitative part the sample size was enough to reach saturation, however the iMotions collection could have benefitted from a bigger and more diverse sample size. Second, the facial expression data collected with iMotions may not fully capture internal emotional states, as facial reactions can be influenced by cultural, contextual, or individual differences. Lastly, the study only examined two advertisements from well-known brands, responses to unknown or less emotionally invested brands may differ.

6.2 Future Research Directions

Future studies should examine emotional branding across larger and more diverse samples, including different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts to assess generalizability. Moreover, further research could apply longitudinal designs to track how emotional engagement evolves over time and affects actual purchase behavior and loyalty. Investigating emotional branding in other product categories such as technology or food could help determine industry-specific differences. Finally, integrating physiological data (e.g., heart rate, skin conductance) with facial recognition and interviews may provide a more complete understanding of consumer emotional response.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Chosen stimuli:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD-R2OzcleQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG9Fionf4AA>

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this conversation is to explore how people emotionally respond to beauty brand advertisements and how these ads might shape their perception of the brand.

We'll begin by discussing two video ads you just watched, one from Dove and one from Rare Beauty. Then, we'll talk more generally about your views on emotional branding in the beauty industry.

There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in your personal impressions, feelings, and thoughts. Everything you share will remain confidential and anonymous. Additionally I would like to record this interview to ease the transcription process if that is ok with you.

Part 1 – Emotional Branding in General

General Attitudes & Perception

How important are emotions in your buying decisions for cosmetics or skincare?

Do you usually notice or care about the emotional message in beauty ads?

Do you think emotional branding (like in these ads) is more effective than traditional ads that focus on product features or price? Why or why not?

Message Effectiveness & Authenticity

What makes an emotional ad feel powerful or credible to you?

Are there any emotional messages that you find overused or inauthentic in beauty advertising?

Trust & Loyalty

Have you ever felt loyal to a brand because of the way they communicate emotionally? Can you give an example?

Do you feel that emotional branding can increase your trust in a brand? Why or why not?

Value Alignment & Broader Perspective

Do you prefer brands that reflect your personal values or lifestyle in their messages? Why is that important to you (or not)?

Do you think emotional branding works better for cosmetics than for other product categories? Why or why not?

Part 2 – Emotional Reactions to the Ads

A. Dove – “The Code”

What were your first thoughts and feelings after watching the Dove ad?

Did any part of the ad make you feel emotional?

→ If yes, what part and why?

→ What emotions (e.g., empathy, sadness, anger) did the ad trigger in you?

Did you find the ad authentic or too staged? What made it feel real (or not real)?

Does this kind of ad make Dove seem more than “just a soap brand”? If so, in what way?

On a scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to try a Dove product after watching this ad?

(1 = Not at all likely, 5 = Very likely)

B. Rare Beauty – “Makeup to Feel Good In”

How did you feel while watching the Rare Beauty ad?

Did any part of the ad make you feel emotional?

→ If yes, what part and why?

→ What emotions did the ad trigger in you?

Do you feel the brand is inclusive and authentic? Why or why not?

Would this kind of message make you want to try their products or recommend them to others?

On a scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to try a Rare Beauty product after watching this ad?

(1 = Not at all likely, 5 = Very likely)

C. Direct Comparison

If you had to describe how each brand made you feel in one word, what would it be?

Is there anything I didn't ask you in this interview that you think might be an additional important information to share?

Appendix 2: R Script

R-script Dove

```
# installing packages

install.packages("ggplot2")

install.packages("ggforce") # for sina plots

library(ggplot2)

library(ggforce)


# load data

df <- read.csv("Participant_cleaned_dove.csv")


# formatting emotions

library(tidyr)

df_long <- pivot_longer(df,
  cols = c("Anger", "Contempt", "Disgust", "Fear", "Joy", "Sadness",
    "Surprise", "Engagement", "Valence", "Sentimentality",
    "Confusion", "Neutral"),
  names_to = "Emotion",
  values_to = "Value")
```


R-script Rare Beauty

```
# Install packages
```

```
install.packages("ggplot2")
```

```
install.packages("ggforce")
```

```
install.packages("tidyverse")
```

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
library(ggforce)
```

```
library(tidyr)
```

```
library(dplyr)
```

```
library(readr)
```

```
# data
```

```
df <- read.csv("Participant_cleaned_rare.csv")
```

```
# time to start from second 1
```

```
df$Timestamp_sec <- (df$Timestamp / 1000) - min(df$Timestamp / 1000)
```

```
# formatting data
```

```
df_long <- pivot_longer(df,
```

```
  cols = c("Anger", "Contempt", "Disgust", "Fear", "Joy", "Sadness",
```

```
    "Surprise", "Engagement", "Valence", "Sentimentality",
```

```
    "Confusion", "Neutral") names_to = "Emotion", values_to = "Value")
```

R script Individual patterns of Emotional Responses - Dove

```
library(dplyr)
```

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
library(readr)
```

```
# 1. Read csv
```

```
files <- list.files(pattern = "_cleaned_dove.csv", full.names = TRUE)
```

```
all_data <- lapply(files, function(file) {
```

```
  df <- read_csv(file)
```

```
  df$Participant <- gsub("_cleaned_dove.csv", "", basename(file))
```

```
  return(df)})
```

```
# 2. Combine
```

```
df_all <- bind_rows(all_data)
```

```
# 3. Time
```

```
df_all$Time_sec <- (df_all$Timestamp / 1000) - min(df_all$Timestamp / 1000)
```

```
# 4. Selected Participants
```

```
df_selected <- df_all %>%
```

```
  filter(Participant %in% c("Name", "Name", "Name"))
```

```
# 5. Changing Participants name
```

```
df_selected <- df_selected %>%
```

```
  mutate(Participant = case_when(
```

```
    Participant == "Name" ~ "P12 (Joy = 0)",
```

```
Participant == "Name" ~ "P13",
```

```
Participant == "Name" ~ "P9",
```

```
TRUE ~ Participant ))
```

```
# 6. Plot
```

```
ggplot(df_selected, aes(x = Time_sec, y = Joy, color = Participant)) +
```

```
geom_line(size = 1) +
```

```
scale_color_manual(values = c(
```

```
"P12" = "red",
```

```
"P13" = "forestgreen",
```

```
"P9" = "blue" )) + labs( title = "Joy over Time – Participants P9, P12 & P13 - Dove",
```

```
x = "Time (seconds)",
```

```
y = "Joy Level") + theme_minimal() + theme(legend.title = element_blank())
```

R script Individual patterns of Emotional Responses – Rare Beauty

```
library(dplyr)
```

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
library(readr)
```

```
# 1. Read csv
```

```
files <- list.files(pattern = "_cleaned_rare.csv", full.names = TRUE)
```

```
all_data <- lapply(files, function(file) {
```

```
  df <- read_csv(file)
```

```
  df$Participant <- gsub("_cleaned_rare.csv", "", basename(file))
```

```
  return(df)})
```

```
# 2. Combine
```

```
df_all <- bind_rows(all_data)
```

```
# 3. Time
```

```
df_all$Time_sec <- (df_all$Timestamp / 1000) - min(df_all$Timestamp / 1000)
```

```
# 4. Select Participants
```

```
df_selected <- df_all %>%
```

```
  filter(Participant %in% c("Name", "Name"))
```

```
# 5. Change names
```

```
df_selected <- df_selected %>%
```

```
  mutate(Participant = case_when(
```

```
Participant == "Name" ~ "P6",
```

```
Participant == "Name" ~ "P7",
```

```
TRUE ~ Participant ))
```

```
# 6. Plot
```

```
ggplot(df_selected, aes(x = Time_sec, y = Joy, color = Participant)) +
```

```
geom_line(size = 1) + scale_color_manual(values = c(
```

```
"P6" = "red",
```

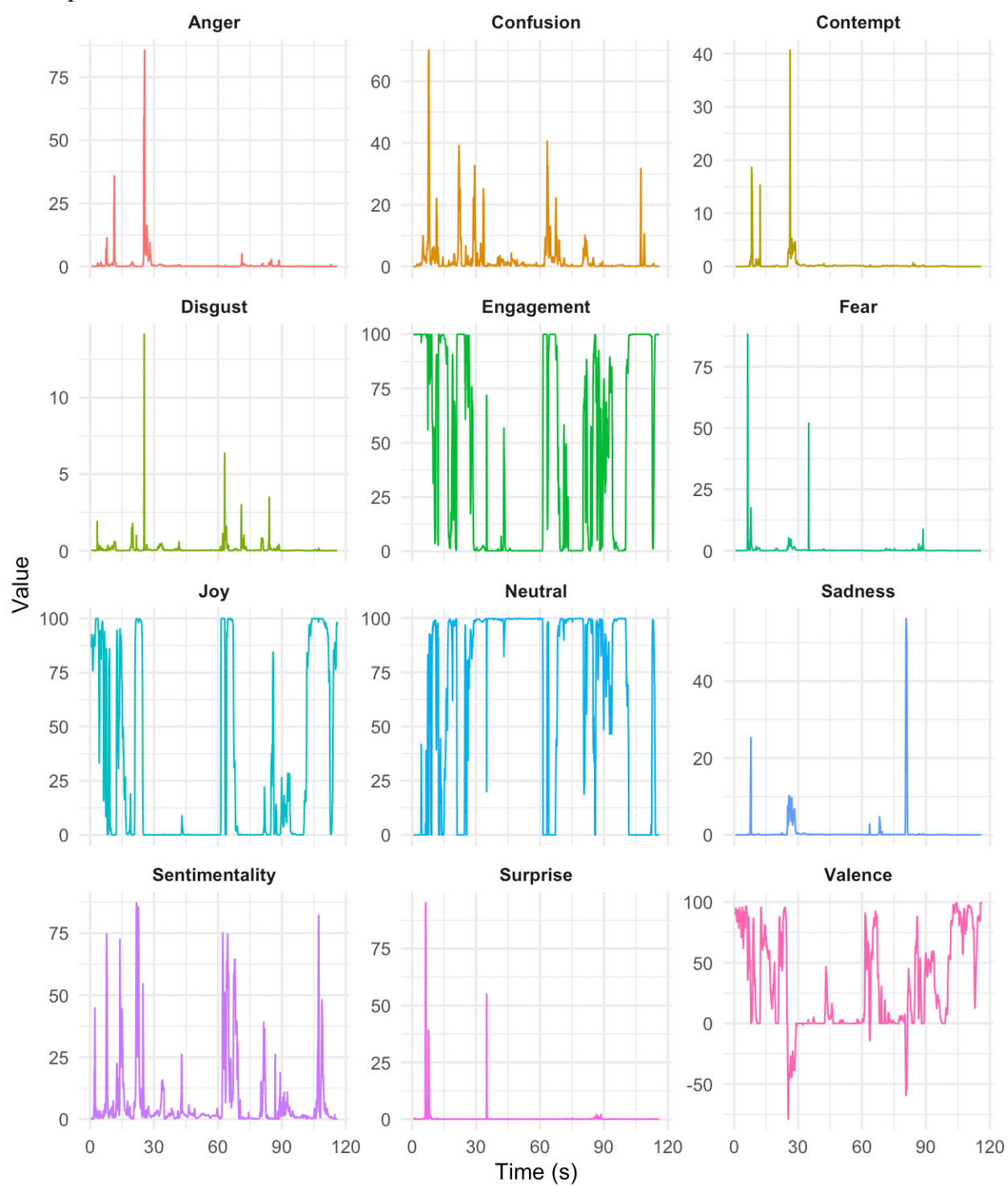
```
"P7" = "royalblue" )) + labs( title = "Joy over Time – Participants P6 & P7 – Rare Beauty",
```

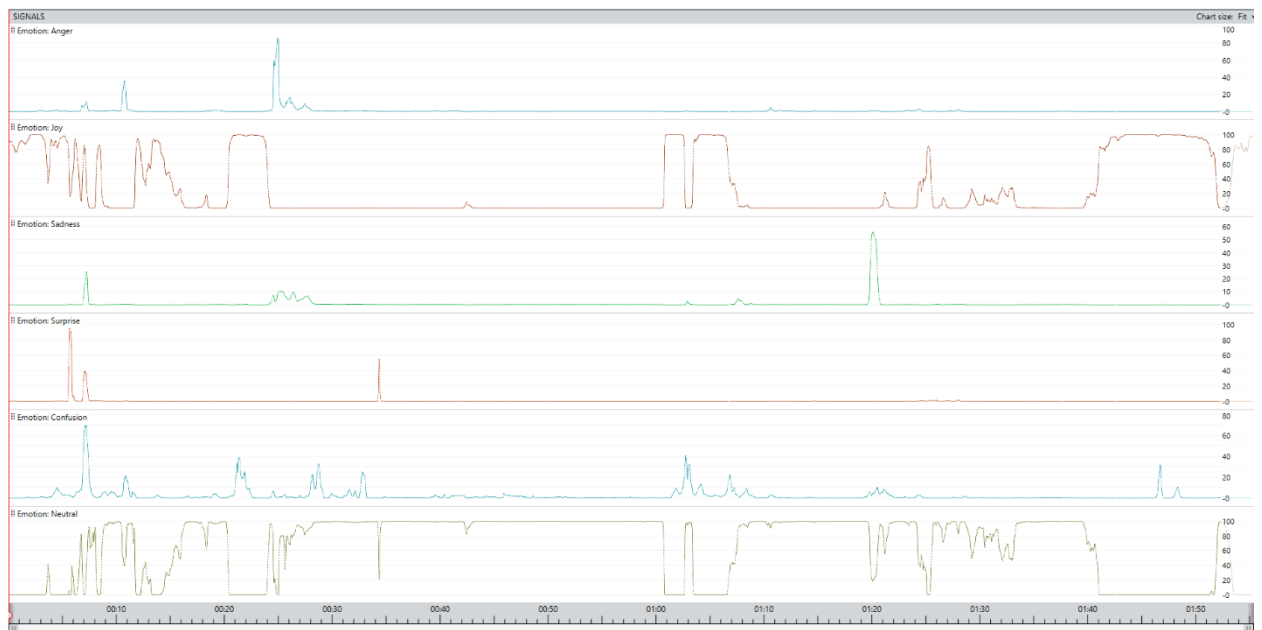
```
x = "Time (seconds)", y = "Joy Level" ) + theme_minimal() +
```

```
theme(legend.title = element_blank())
```

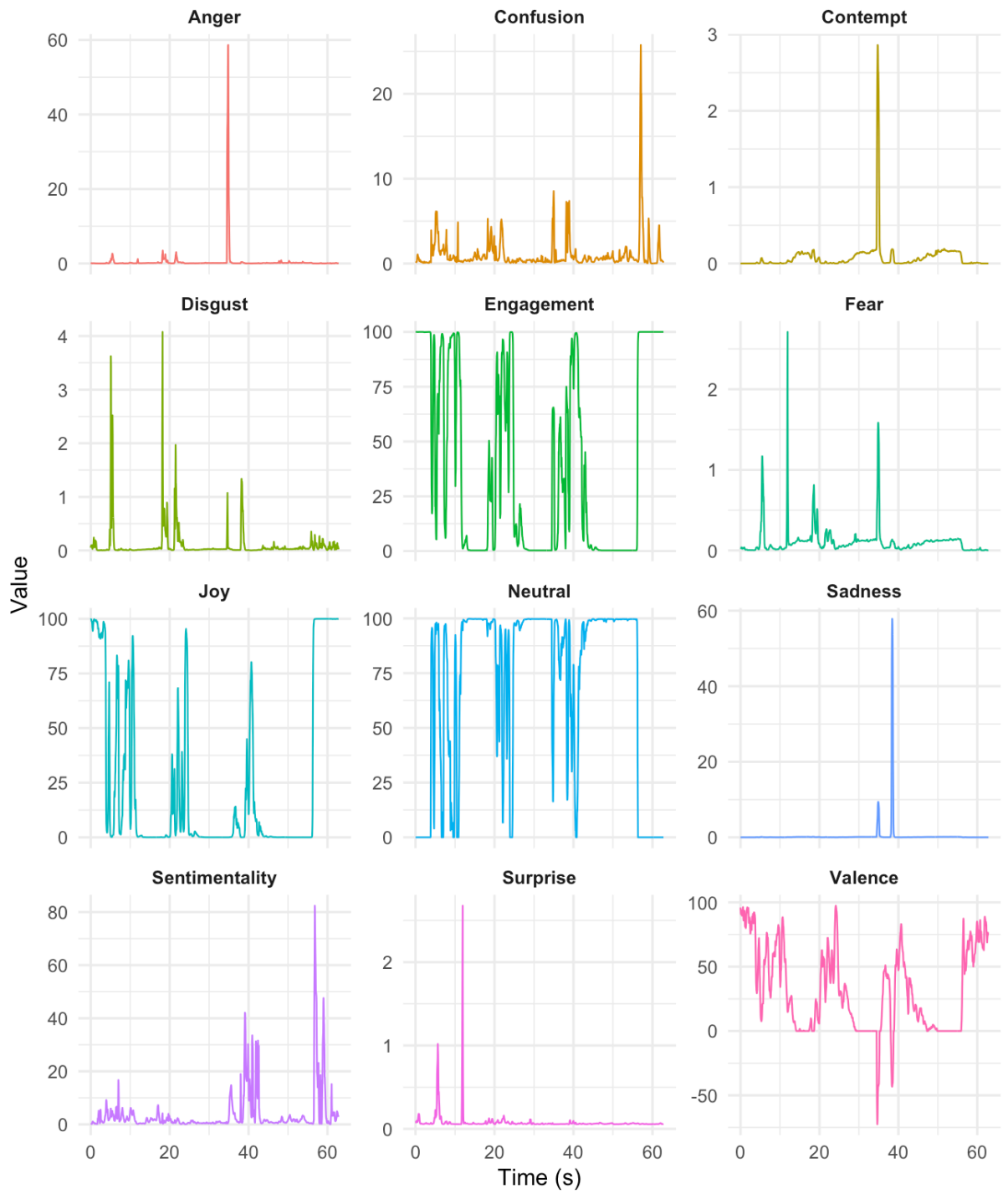
Appendix 3: iMotions Results

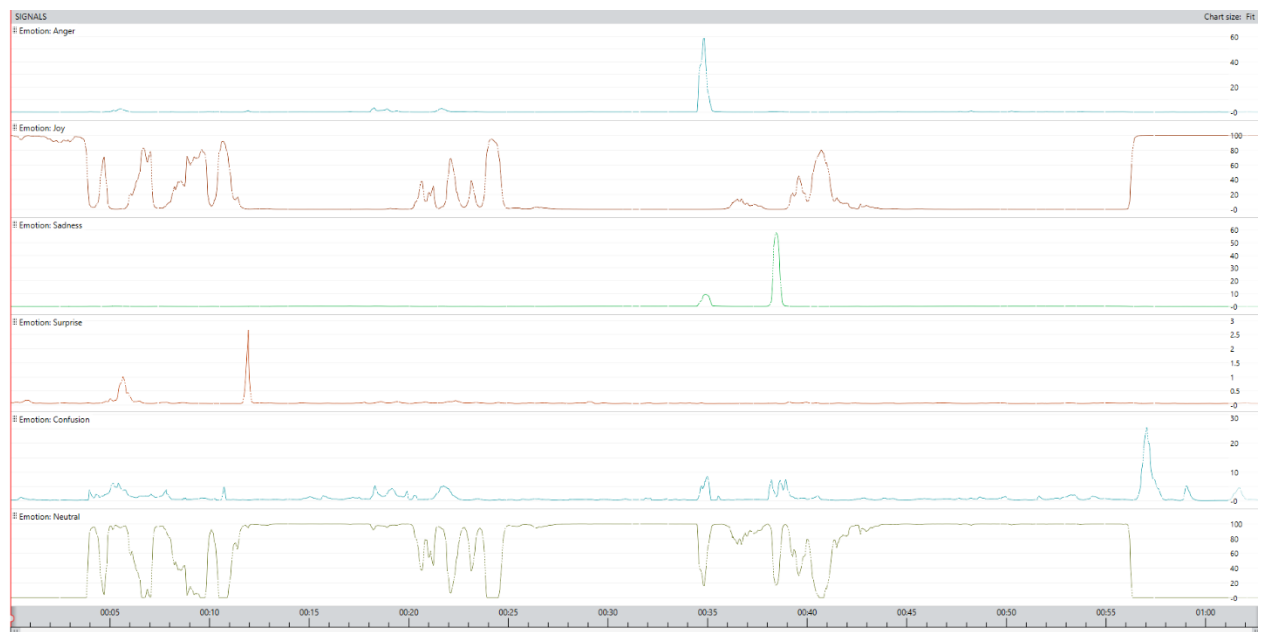
Participant 1: Dove



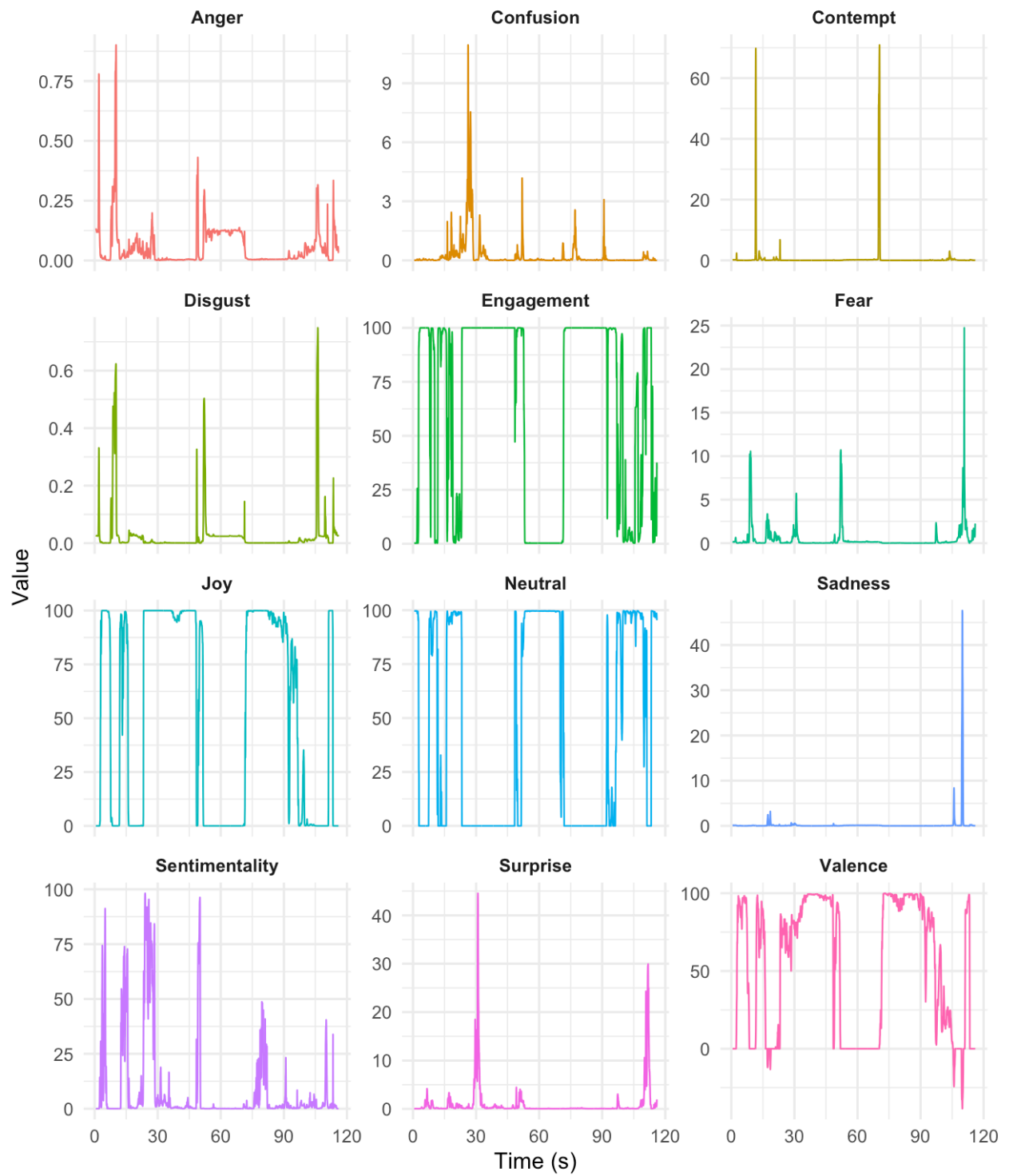


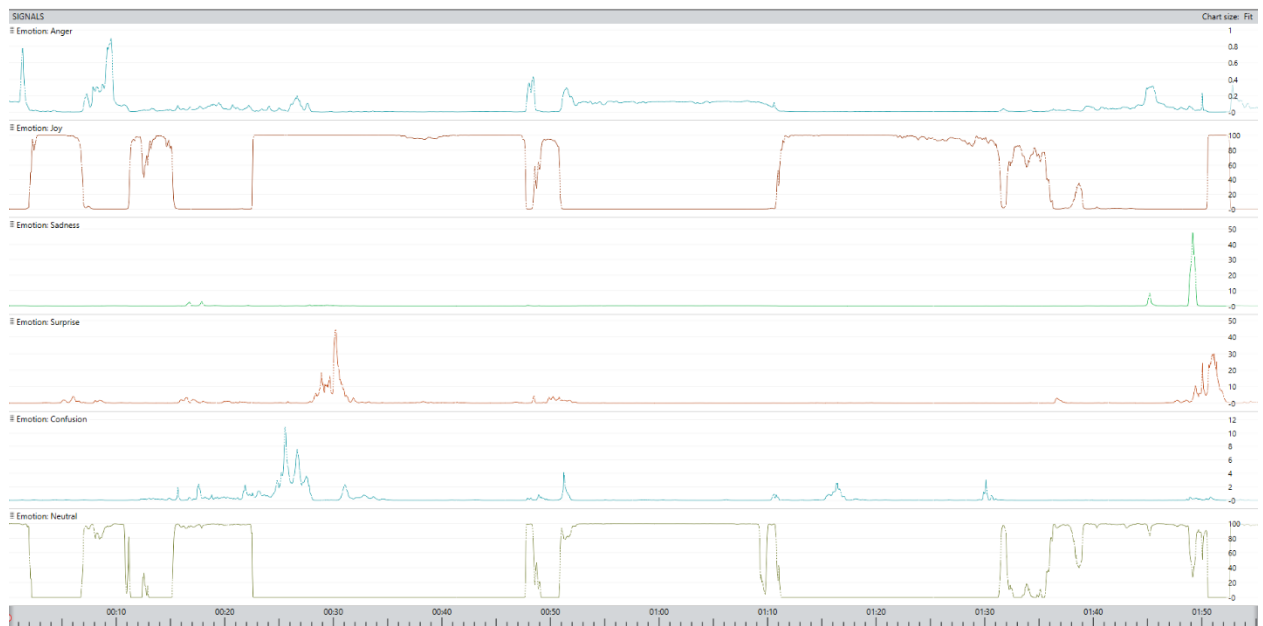
Participant 1: Rare Beauty



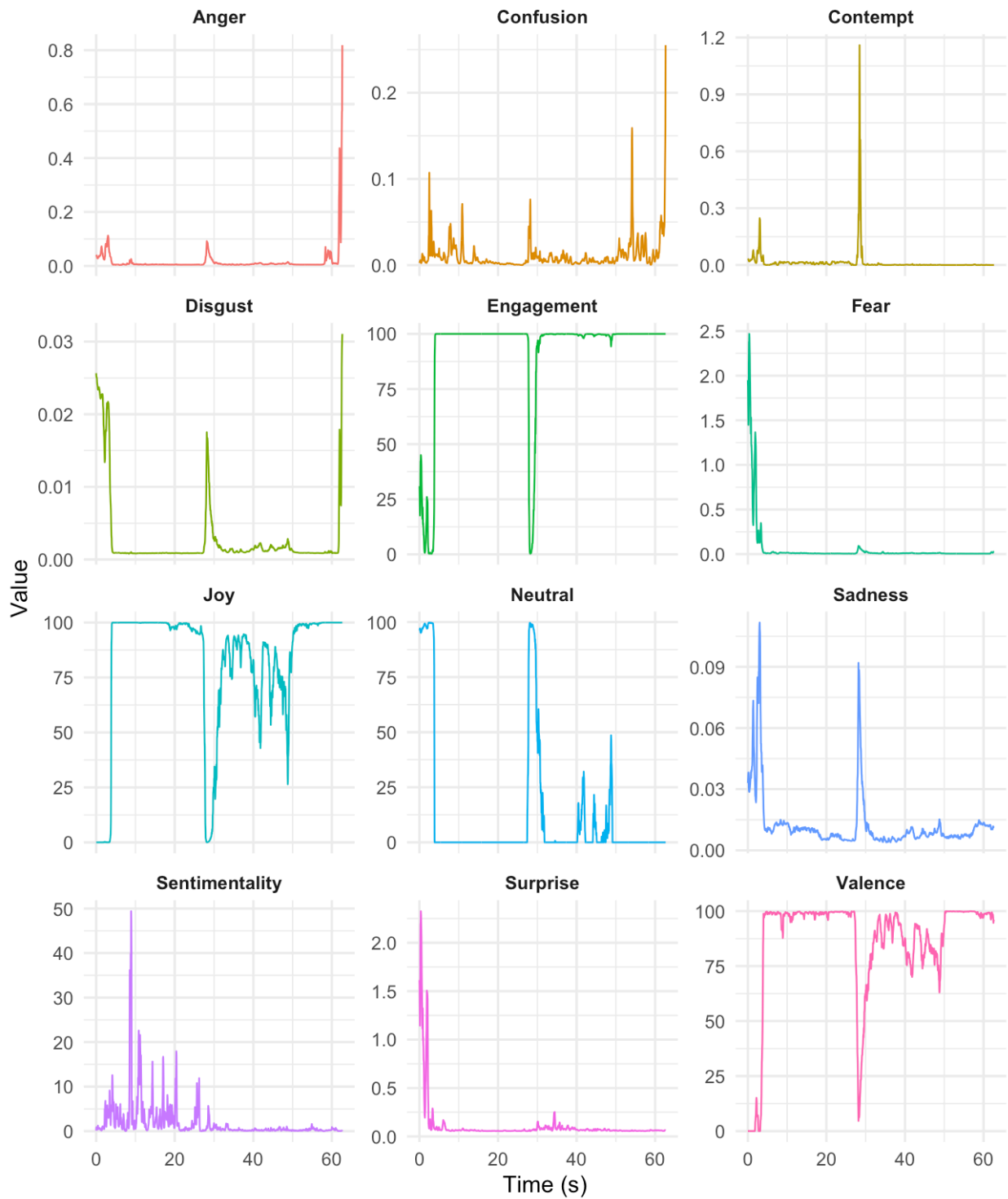


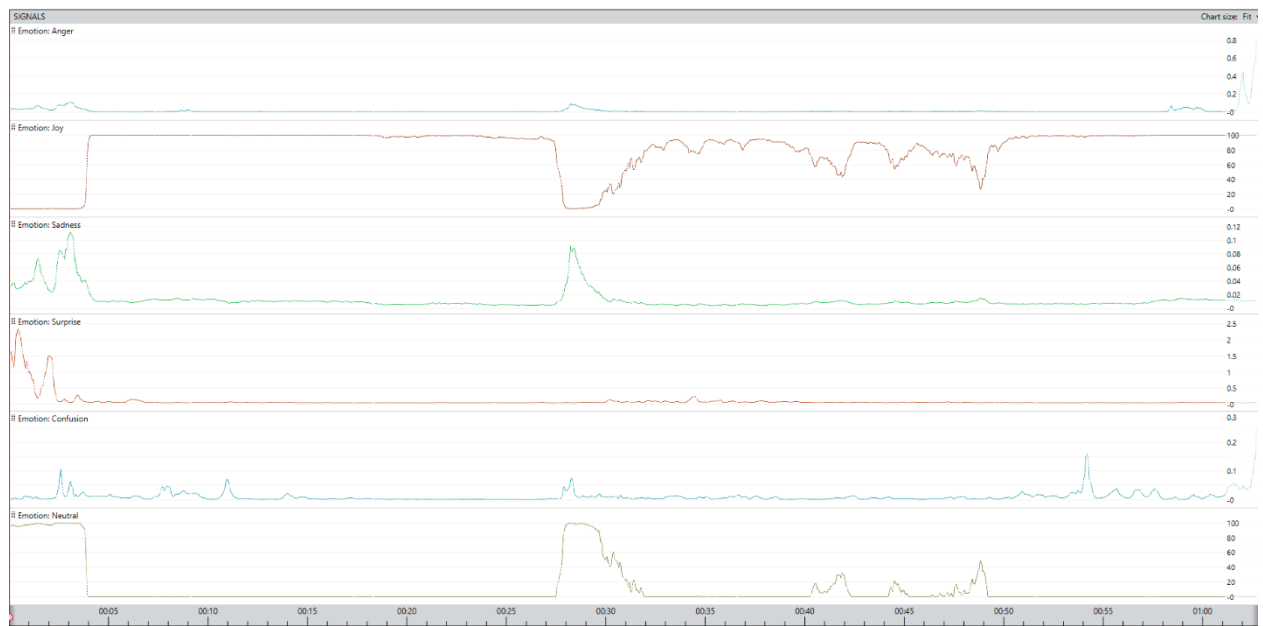
Participant 2: Dove



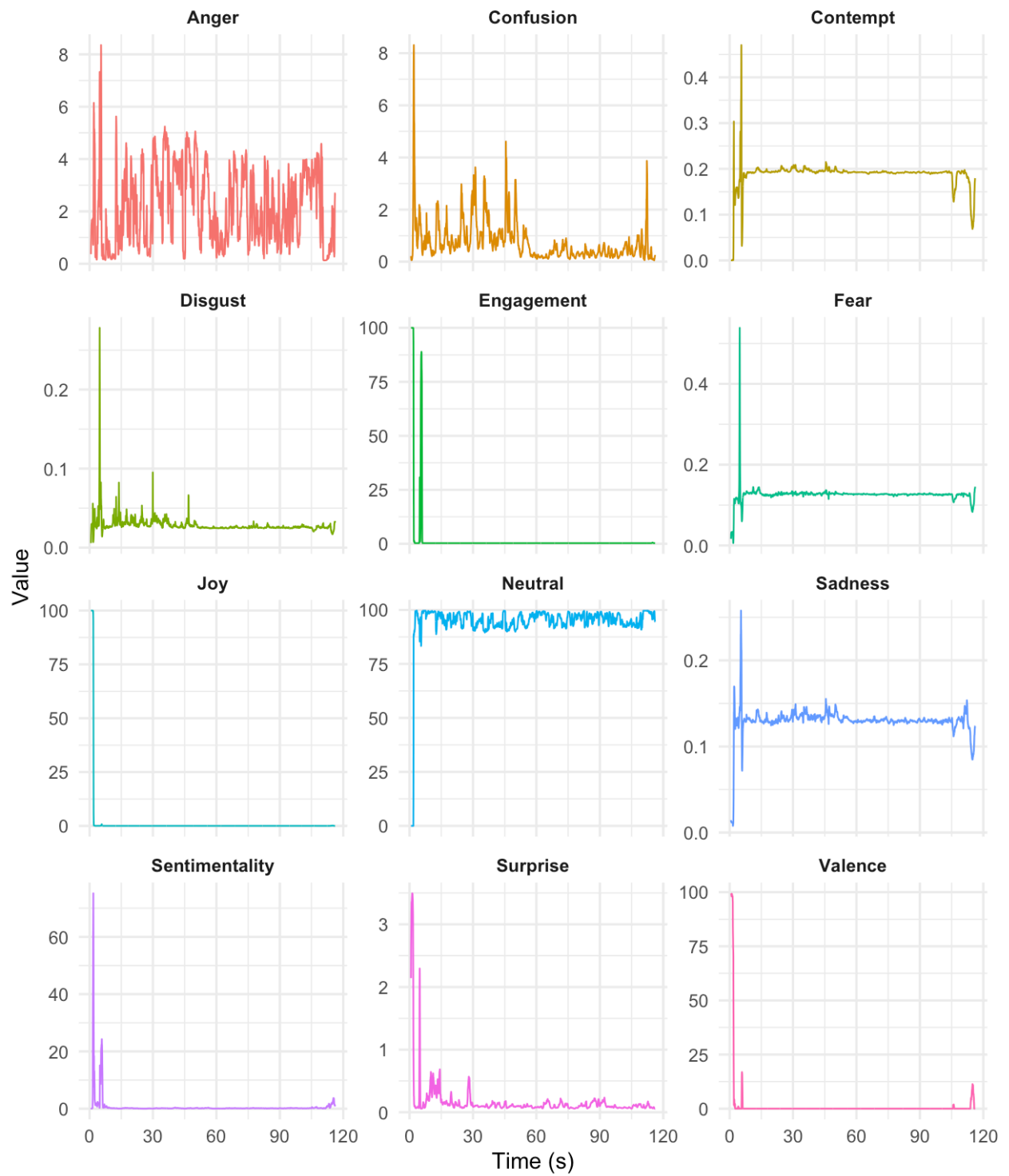


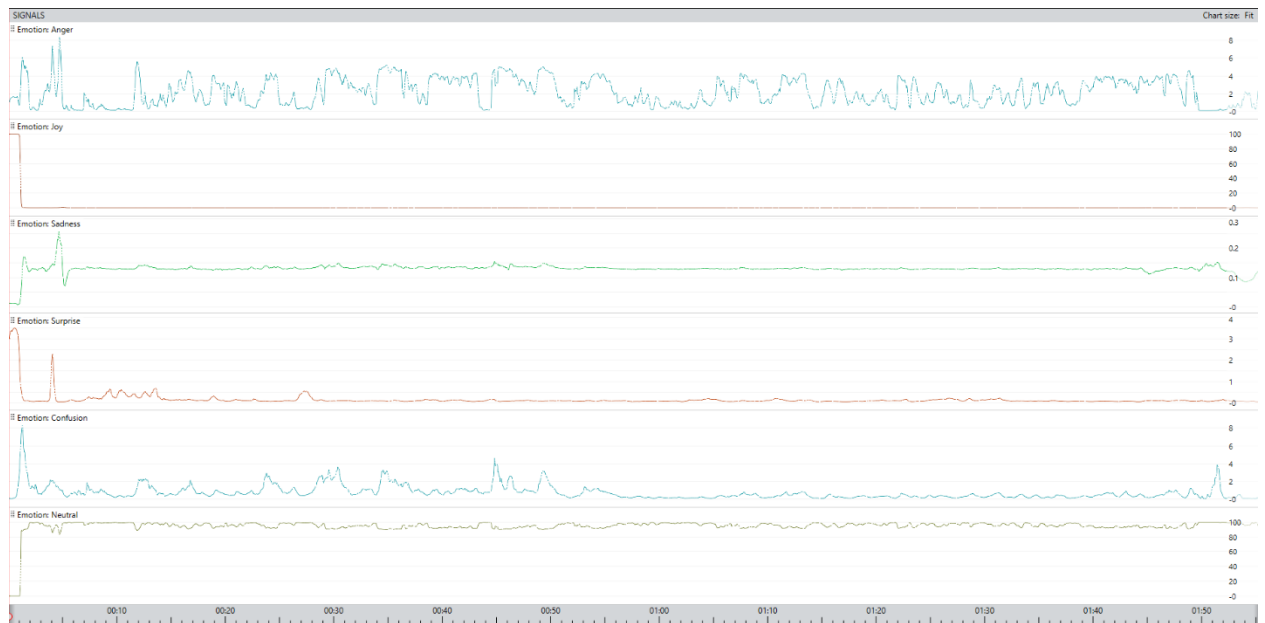
Participant 2: Rare Beauty



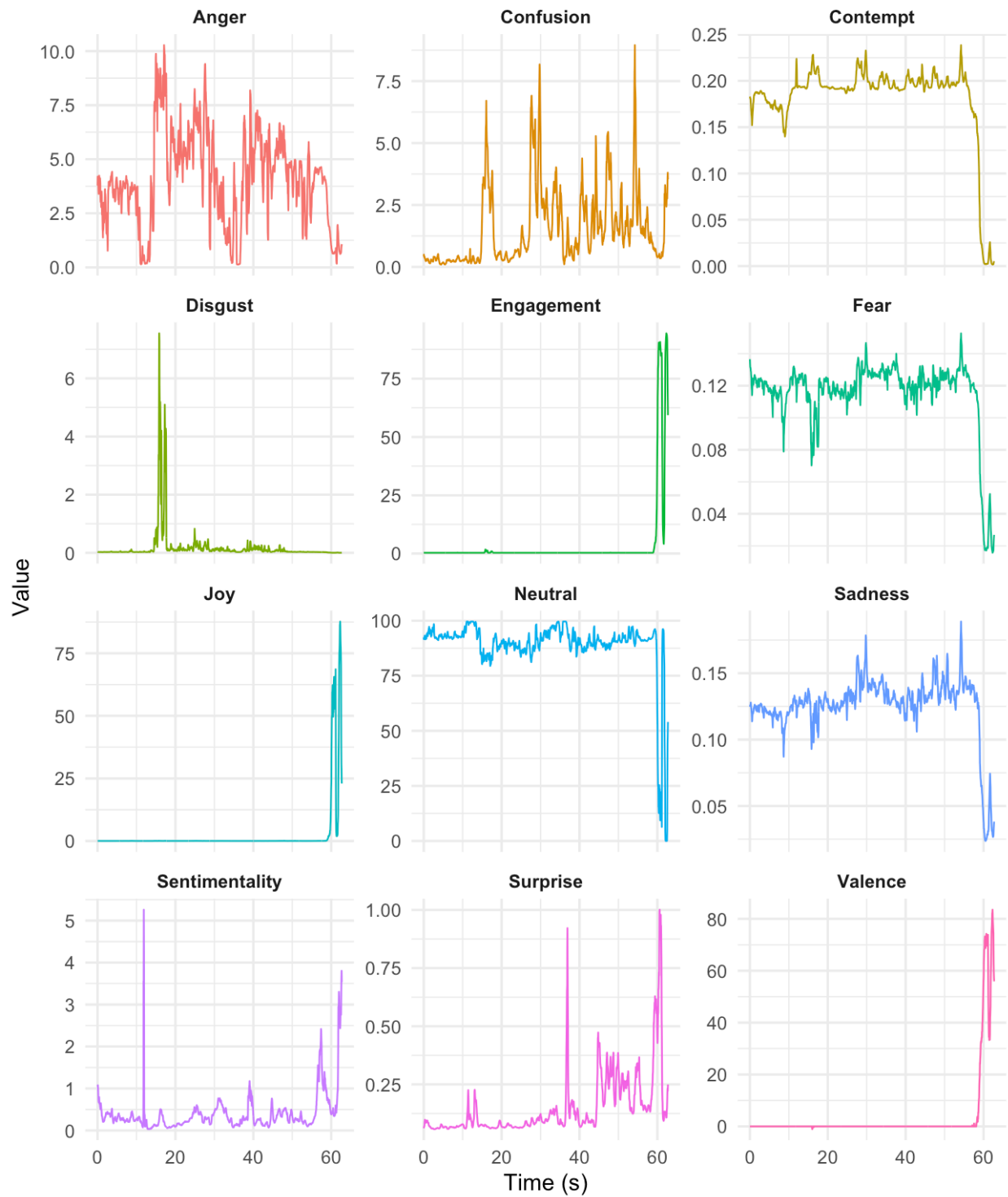


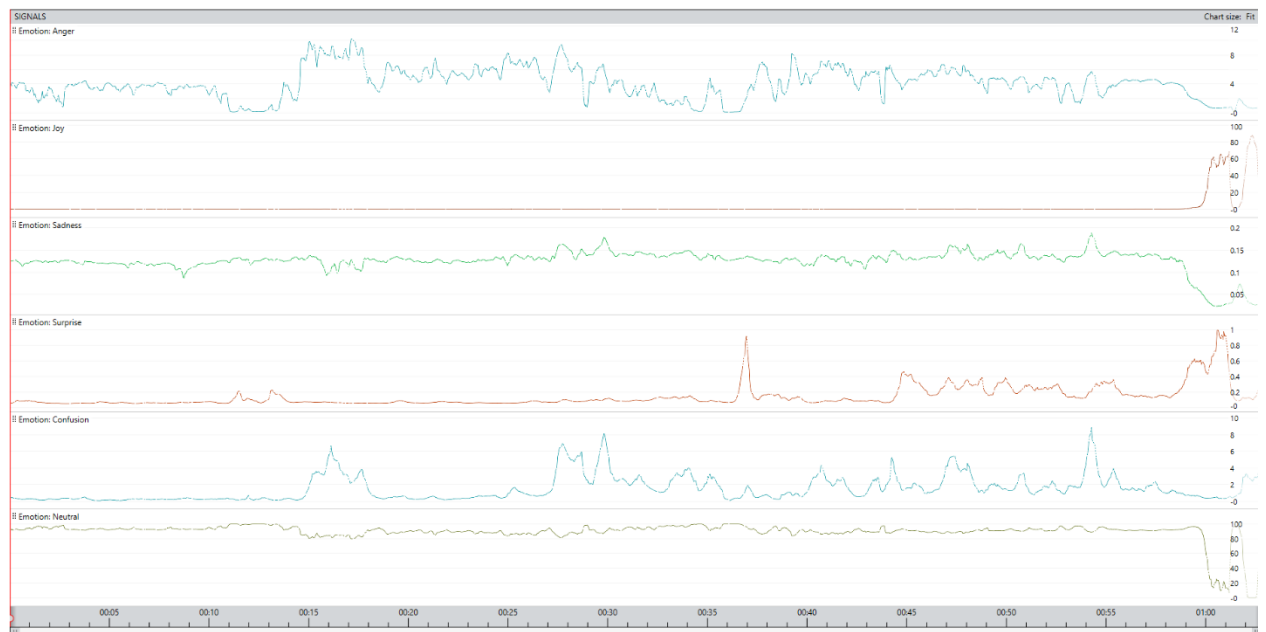
Participant 3: Dove



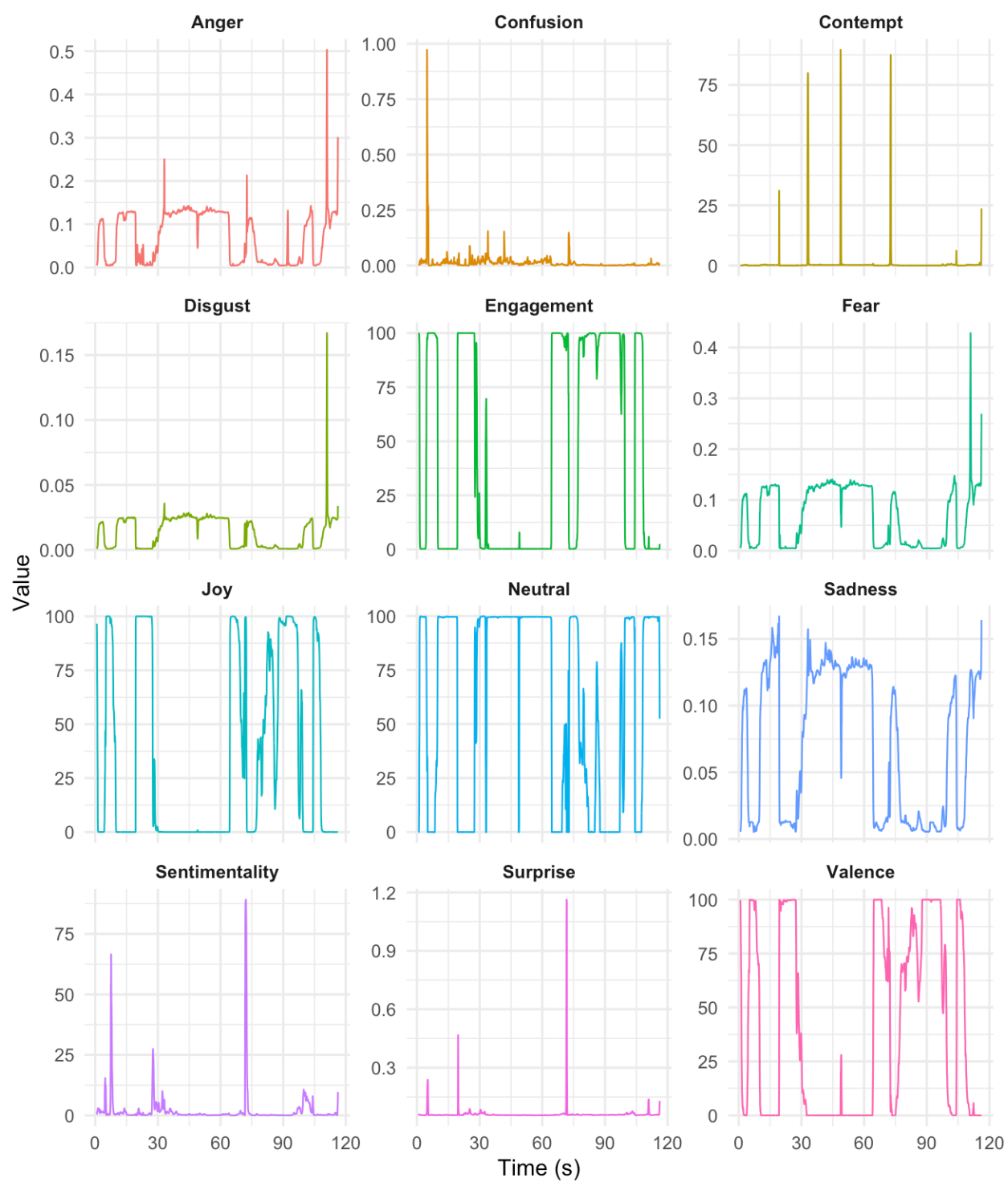


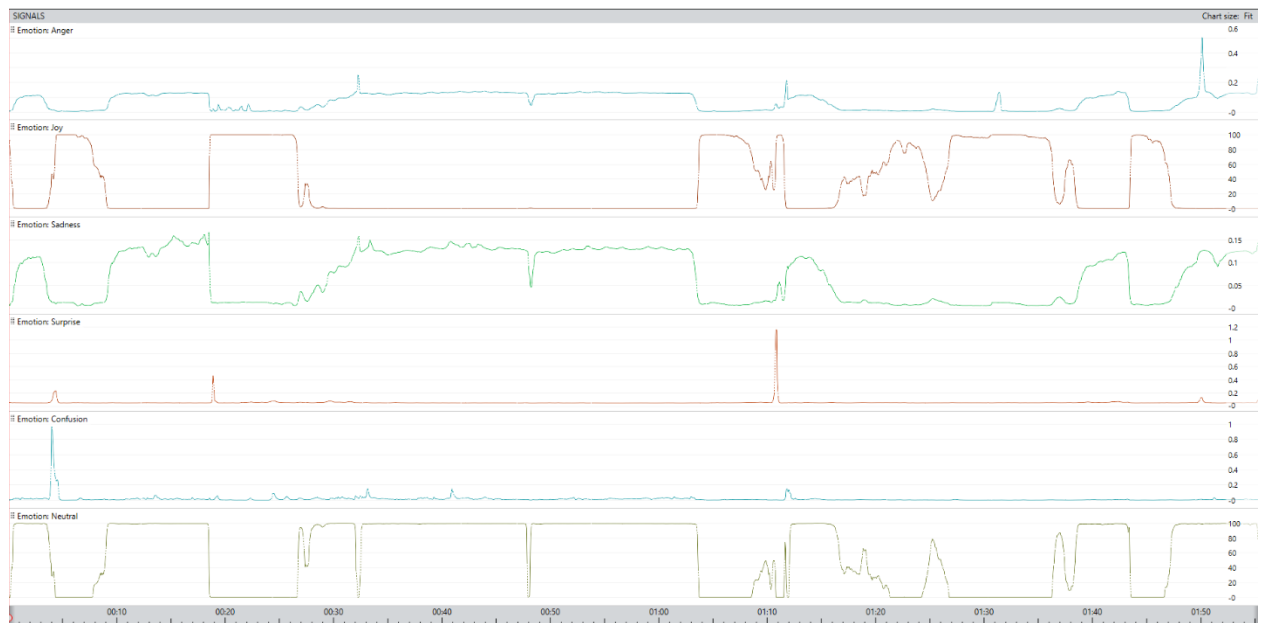
Participant 3: Rare Beauty



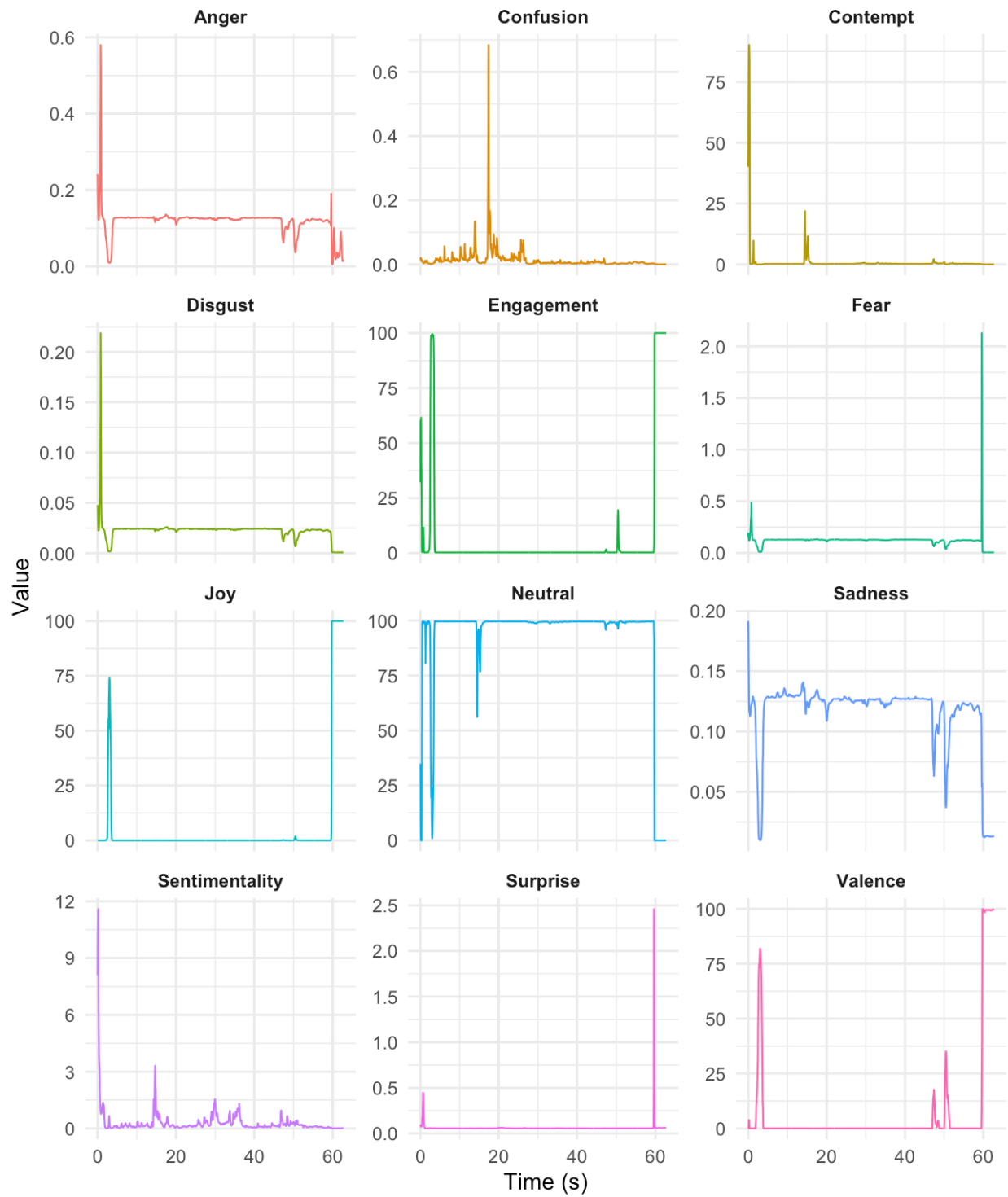


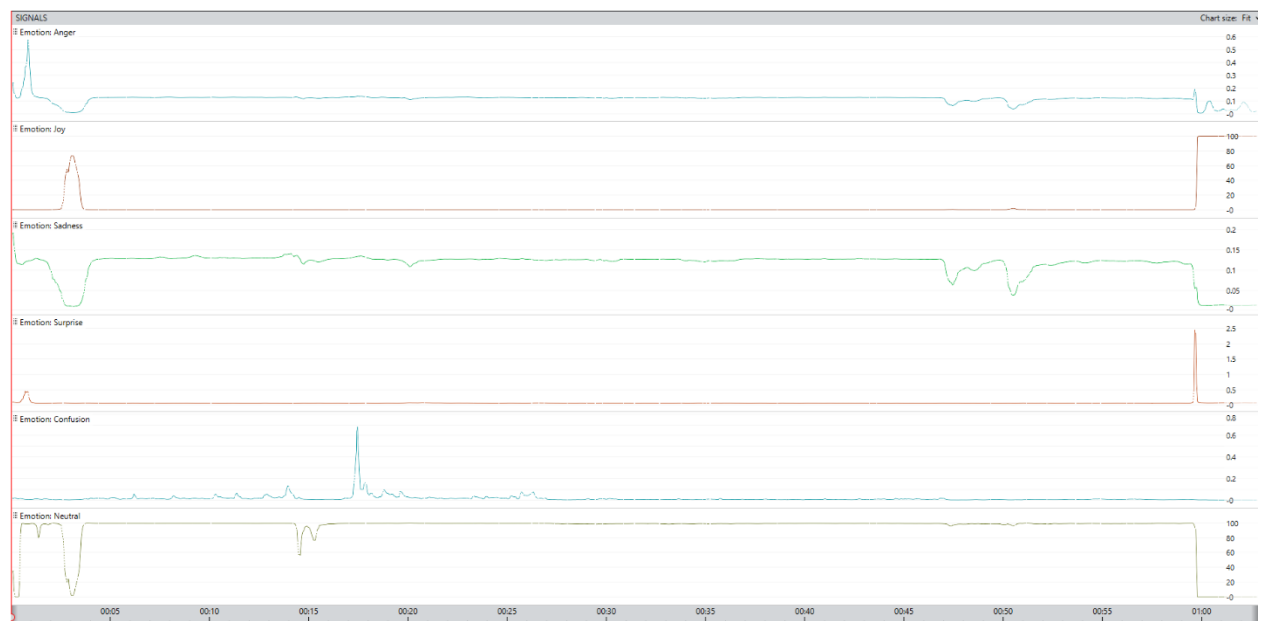
Participant 4: Dove



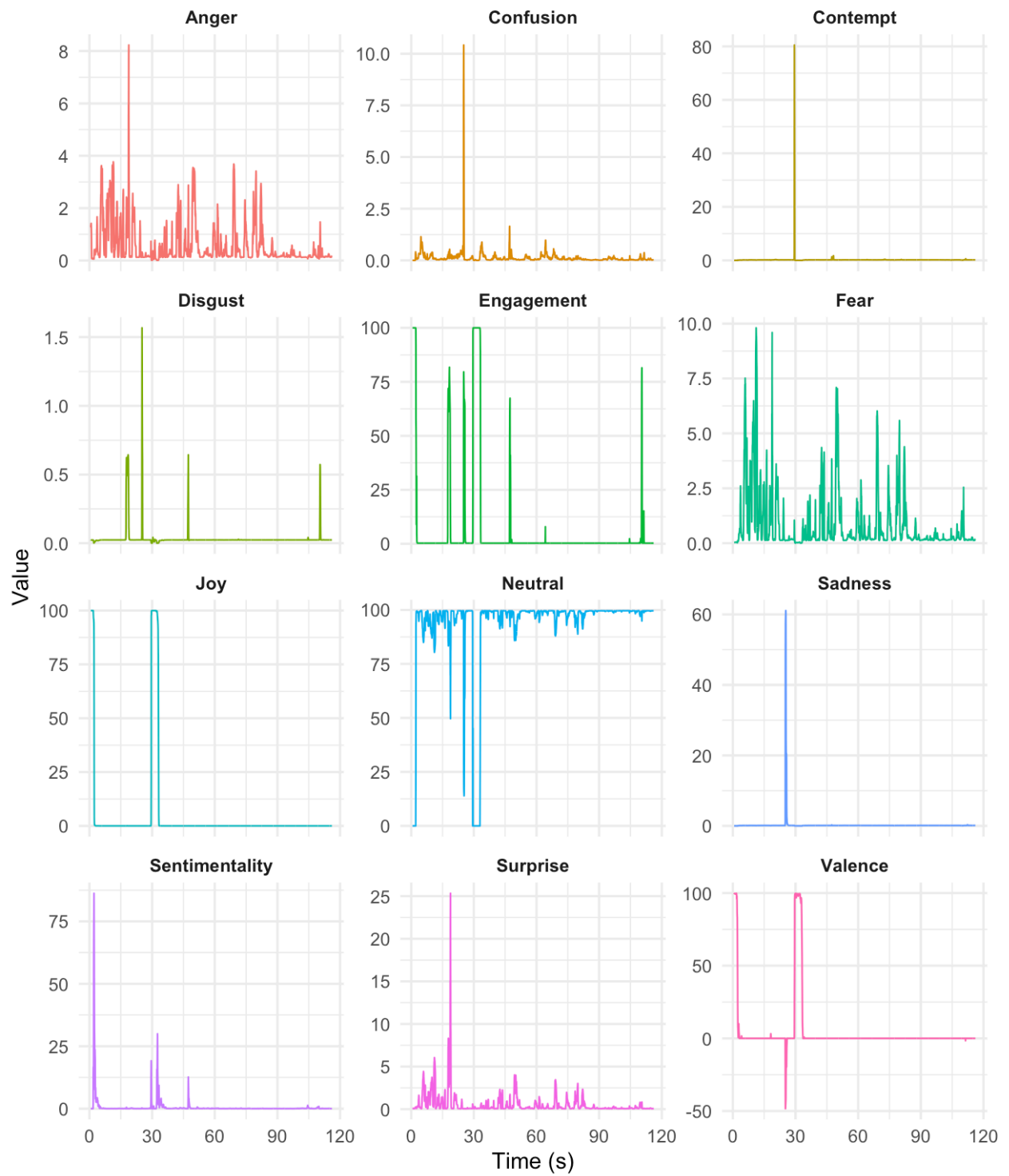


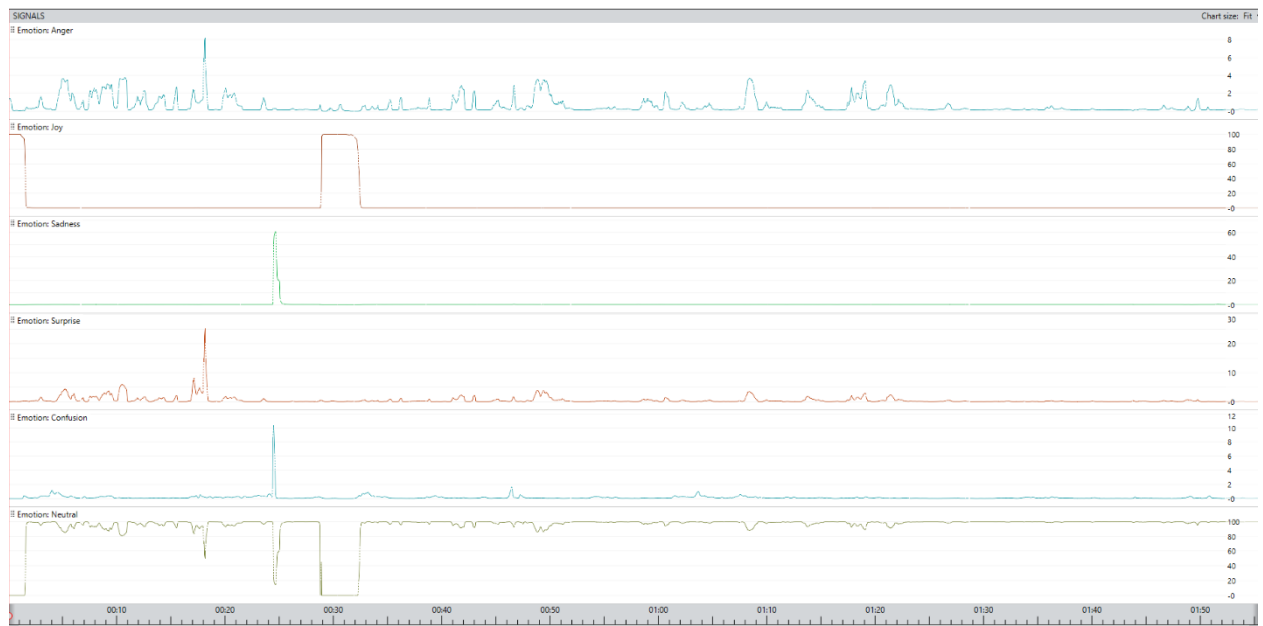
Participant 4: Rare Beauty



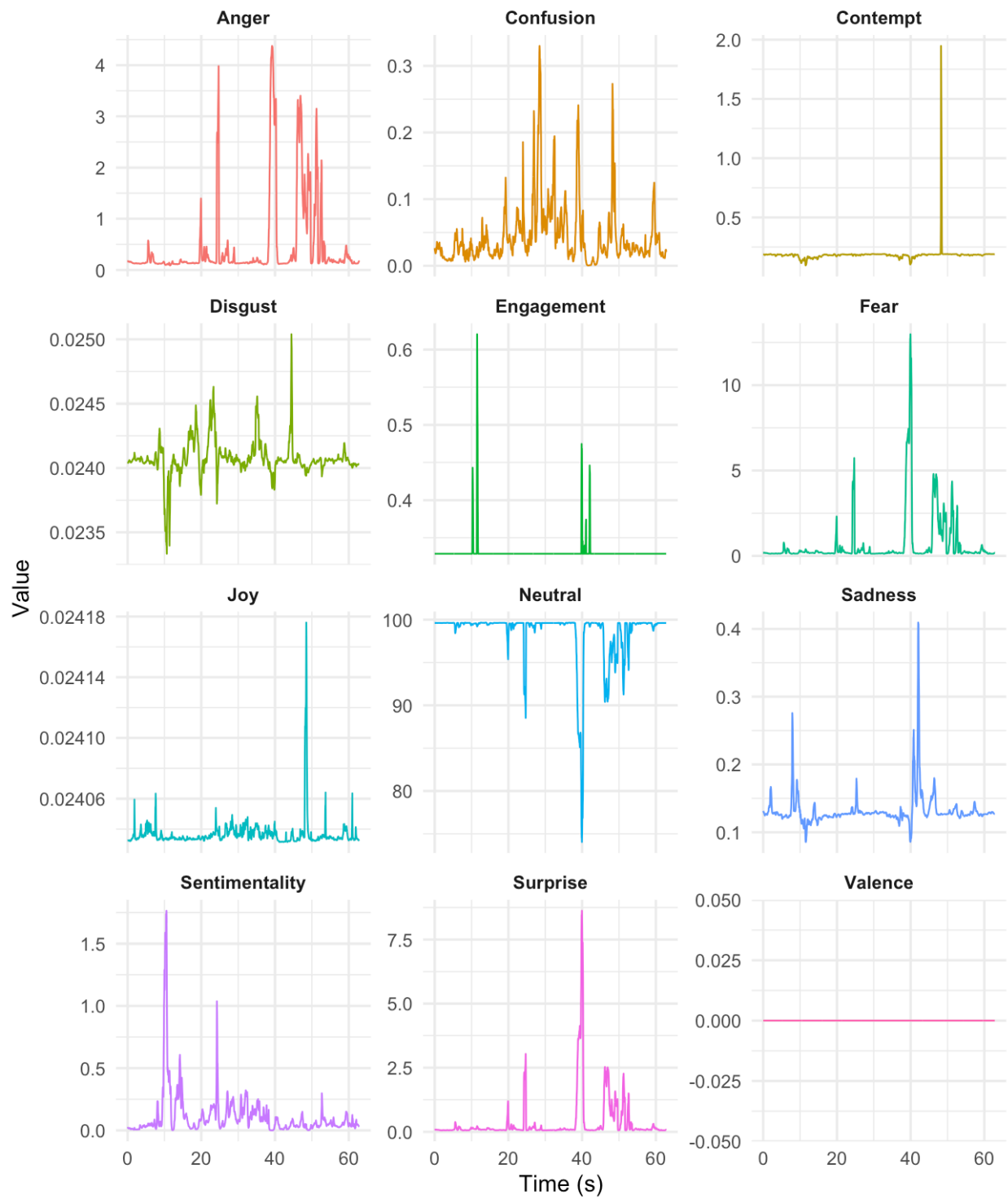


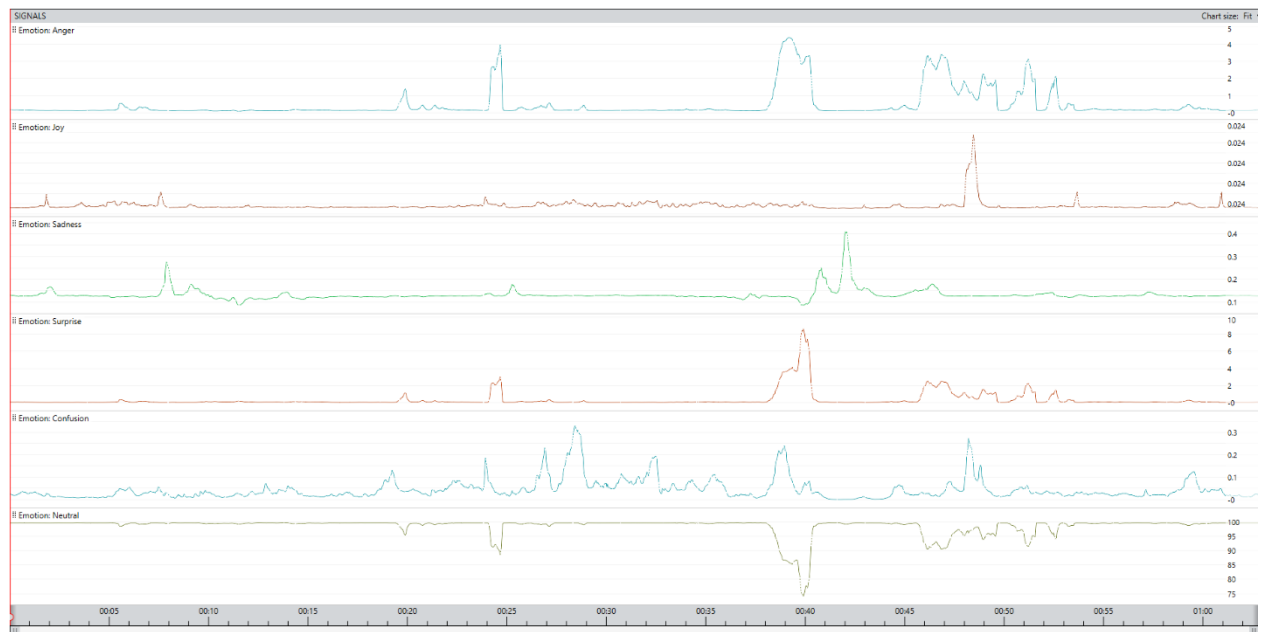
Participant 5: Dove



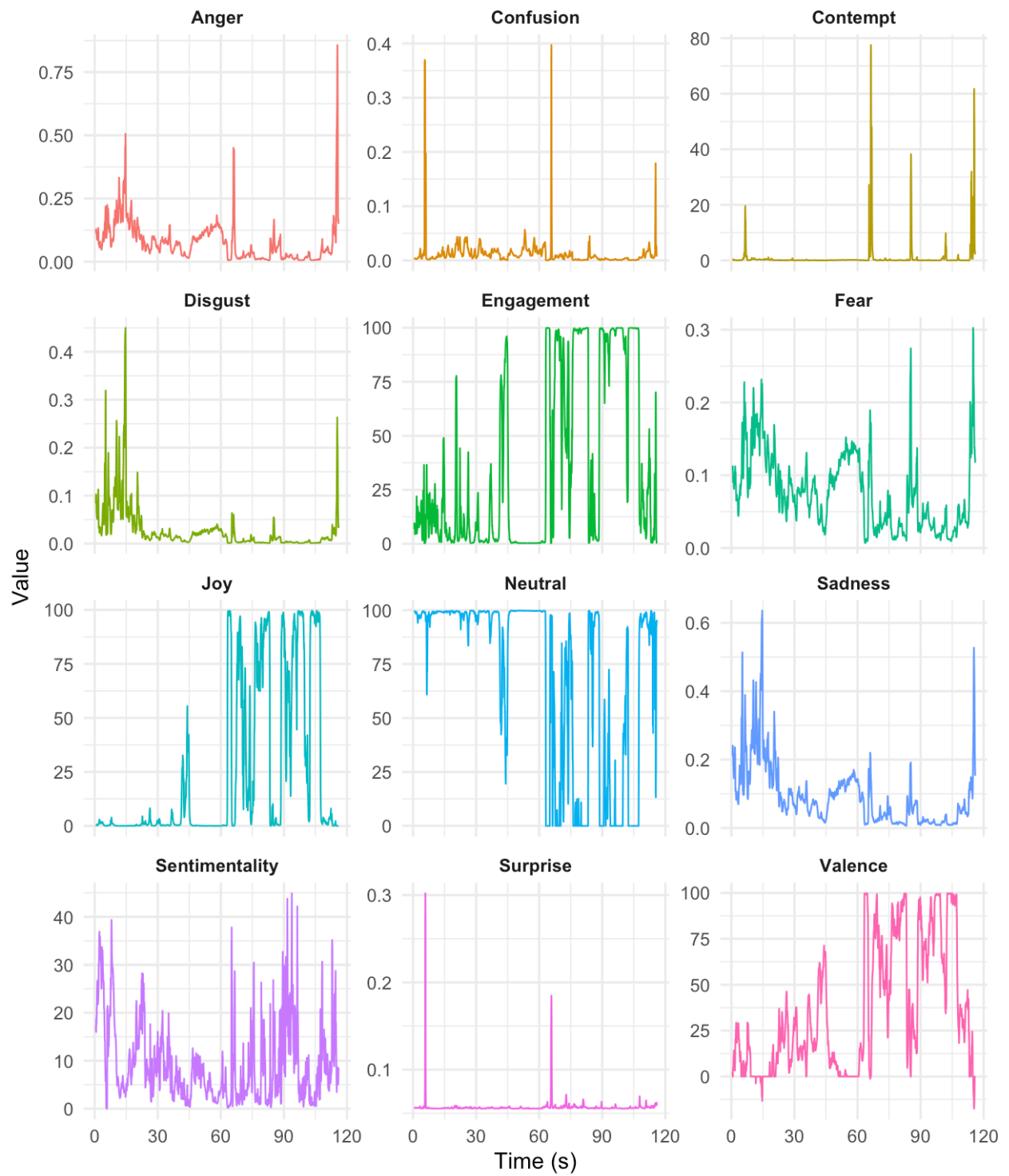


Participant 5: Rare Beauty



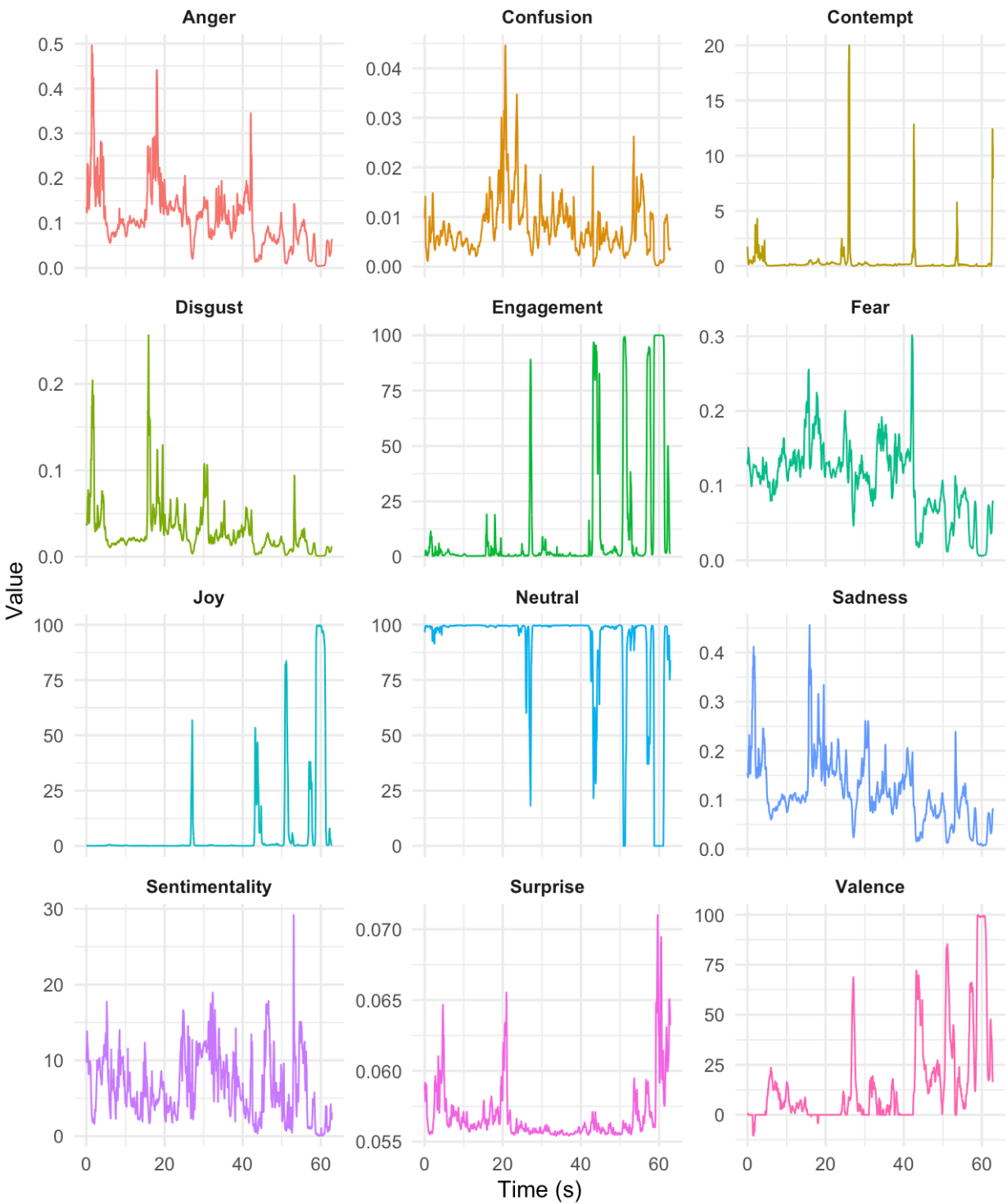


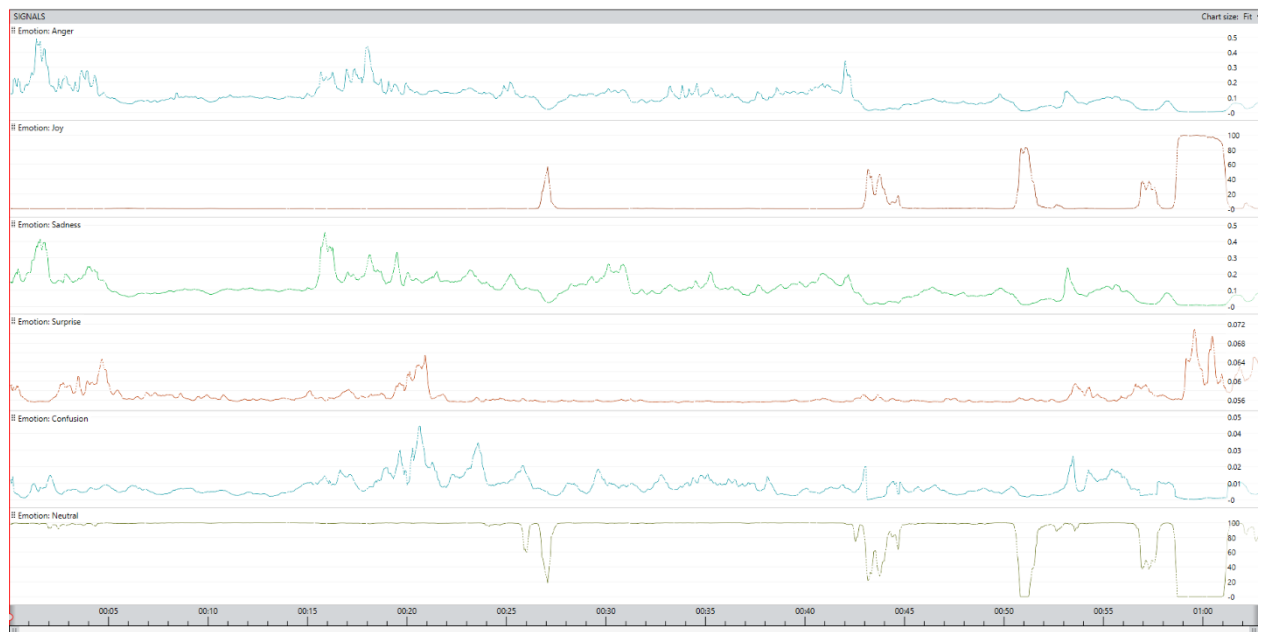
Participant 6: Dove



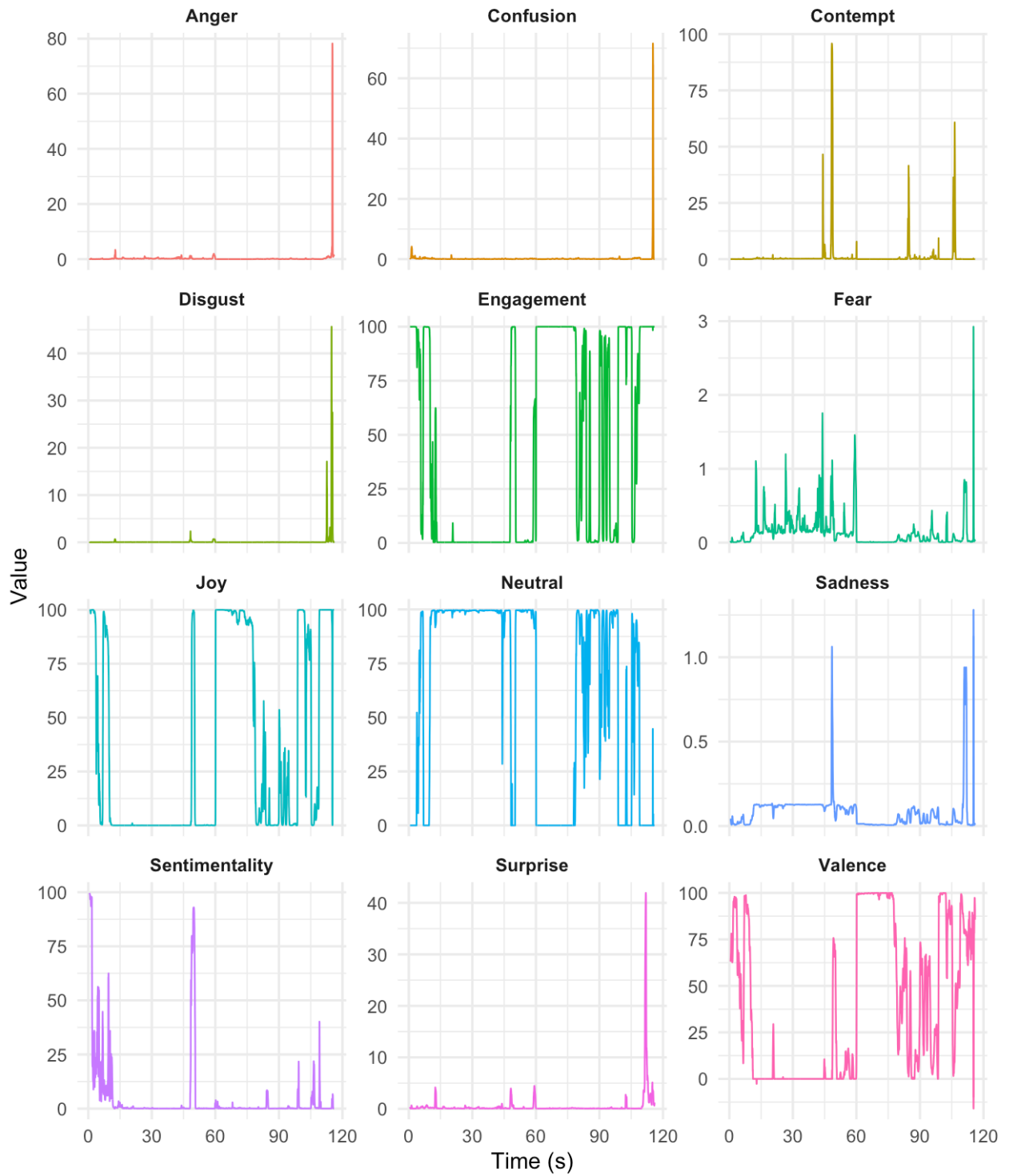


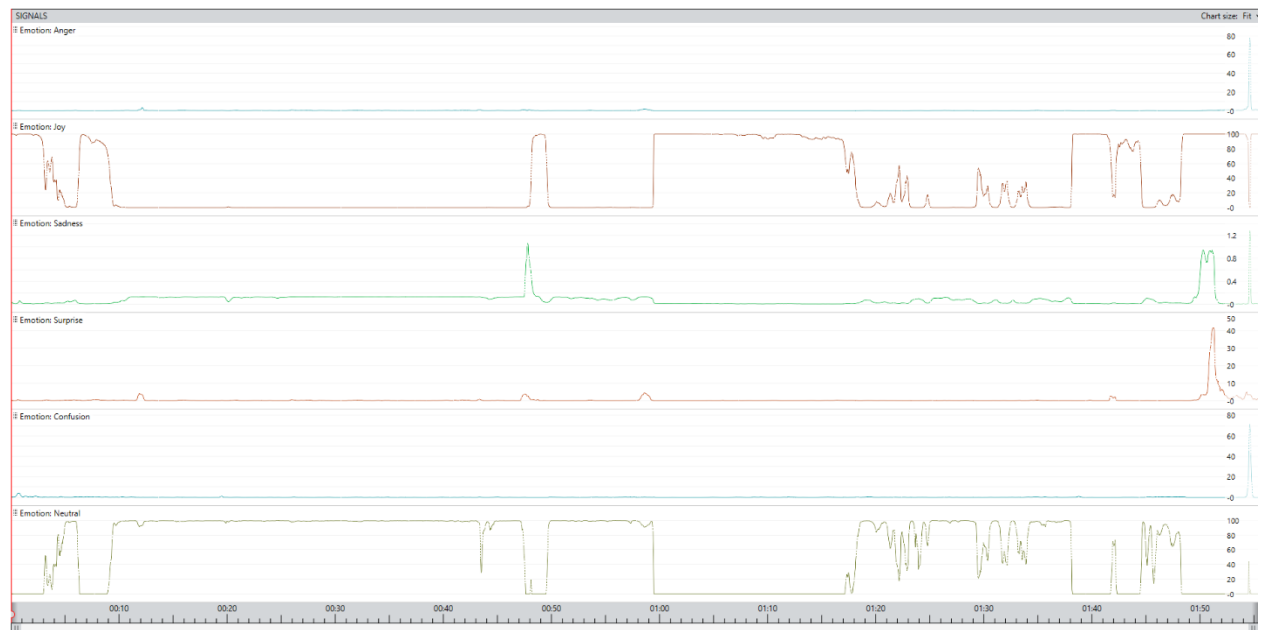
Participant 6: Rare Beauty



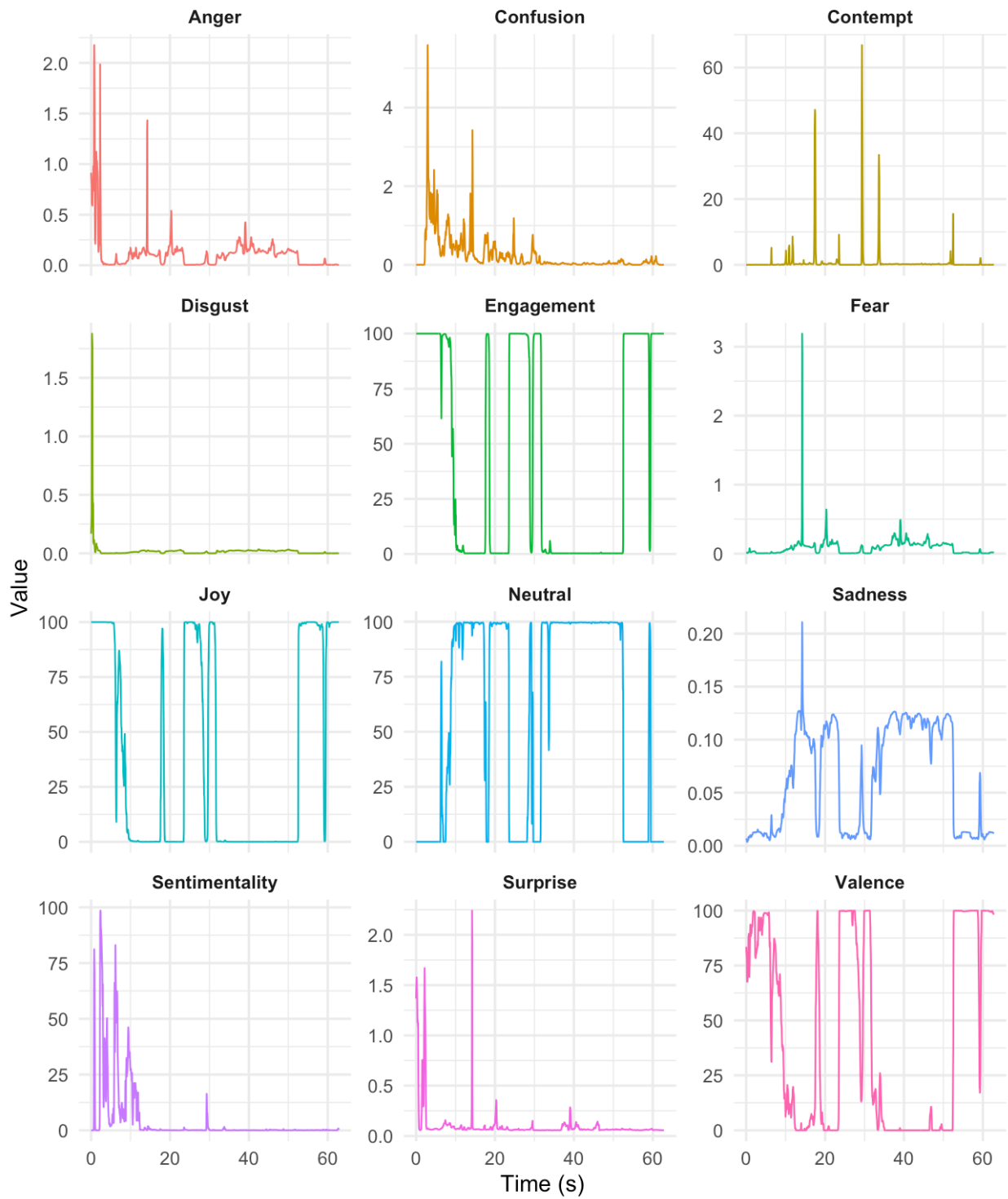


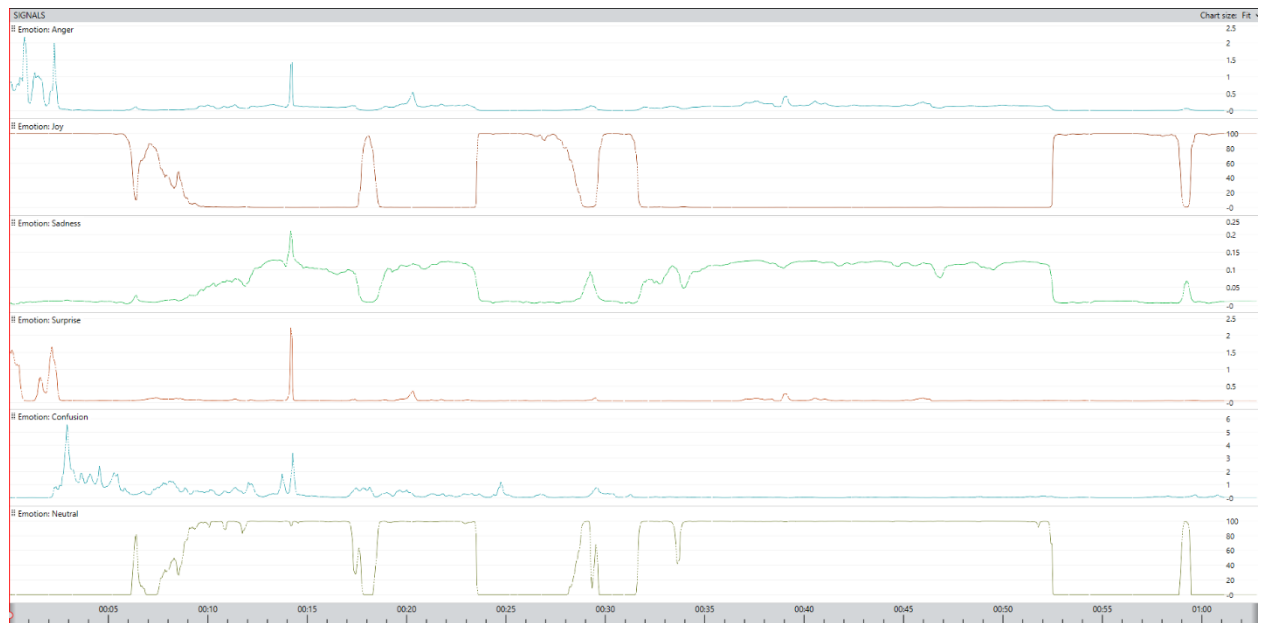
Participant 7: Dove



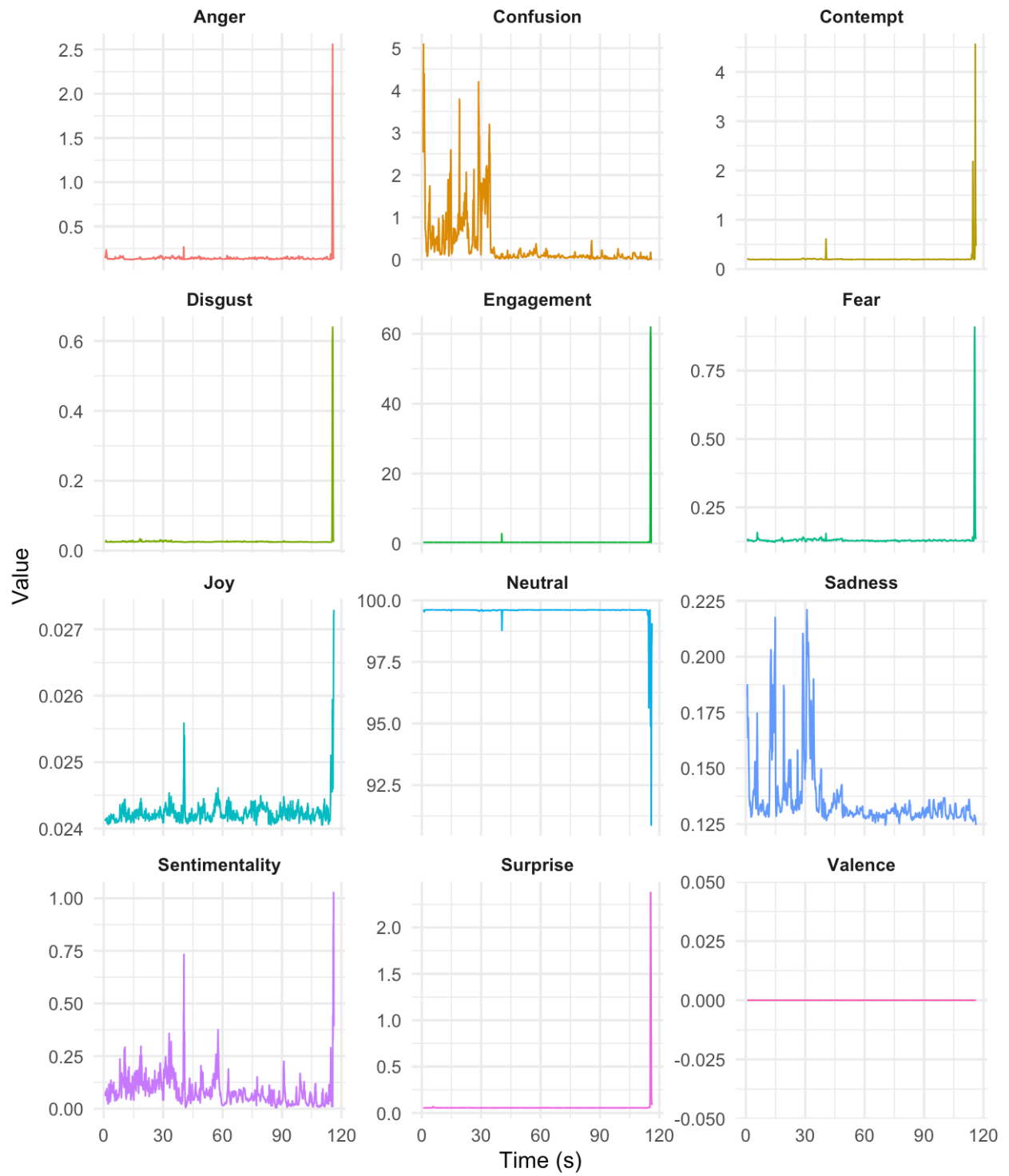


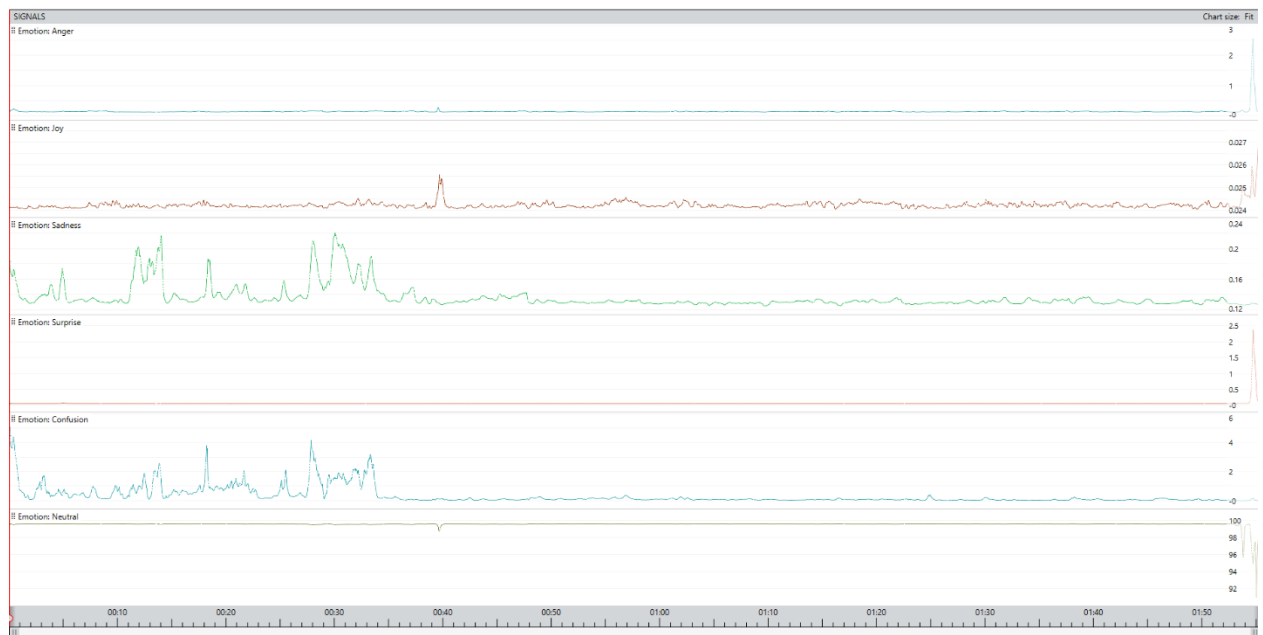
Participant 7: Rare Beauty



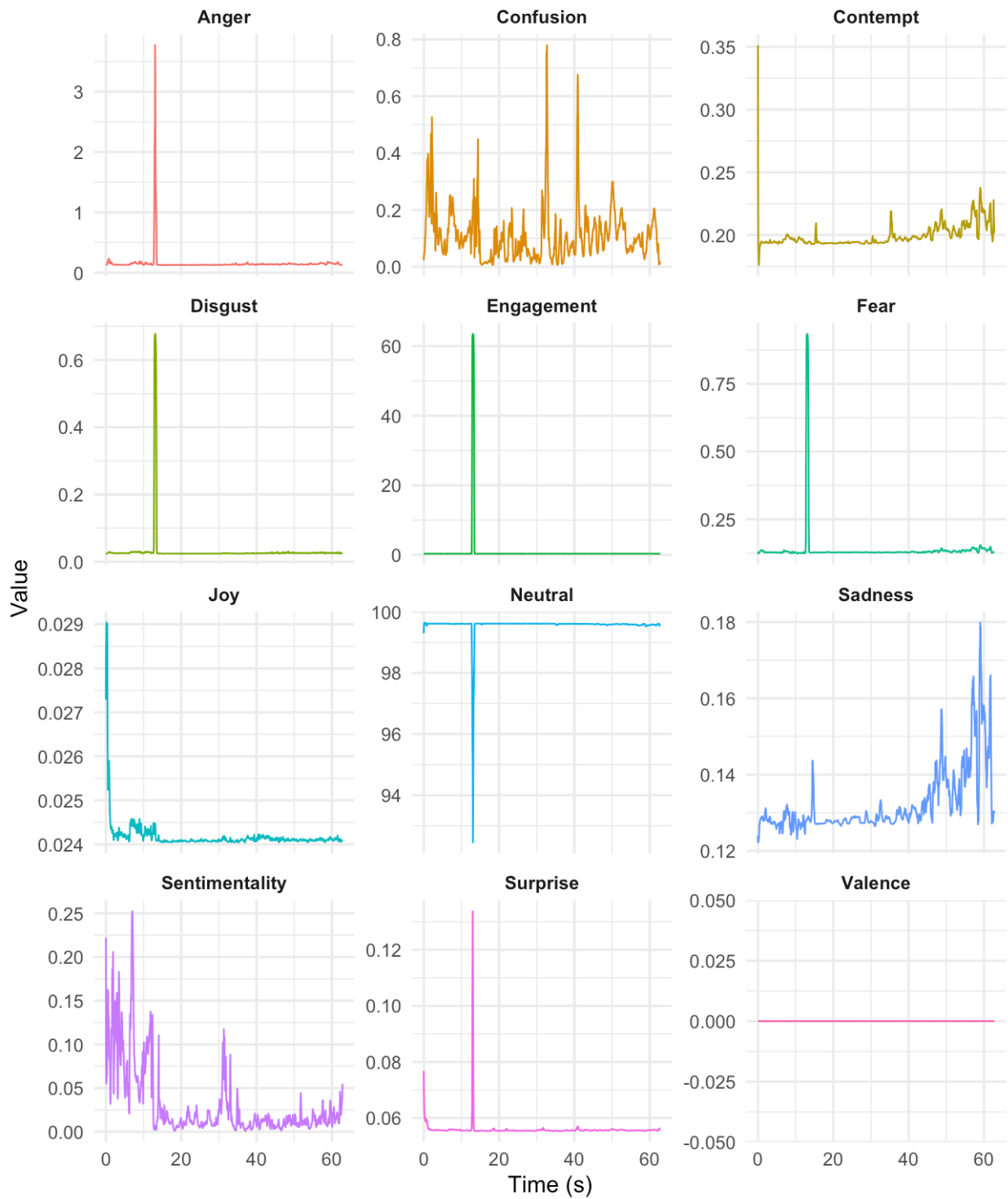


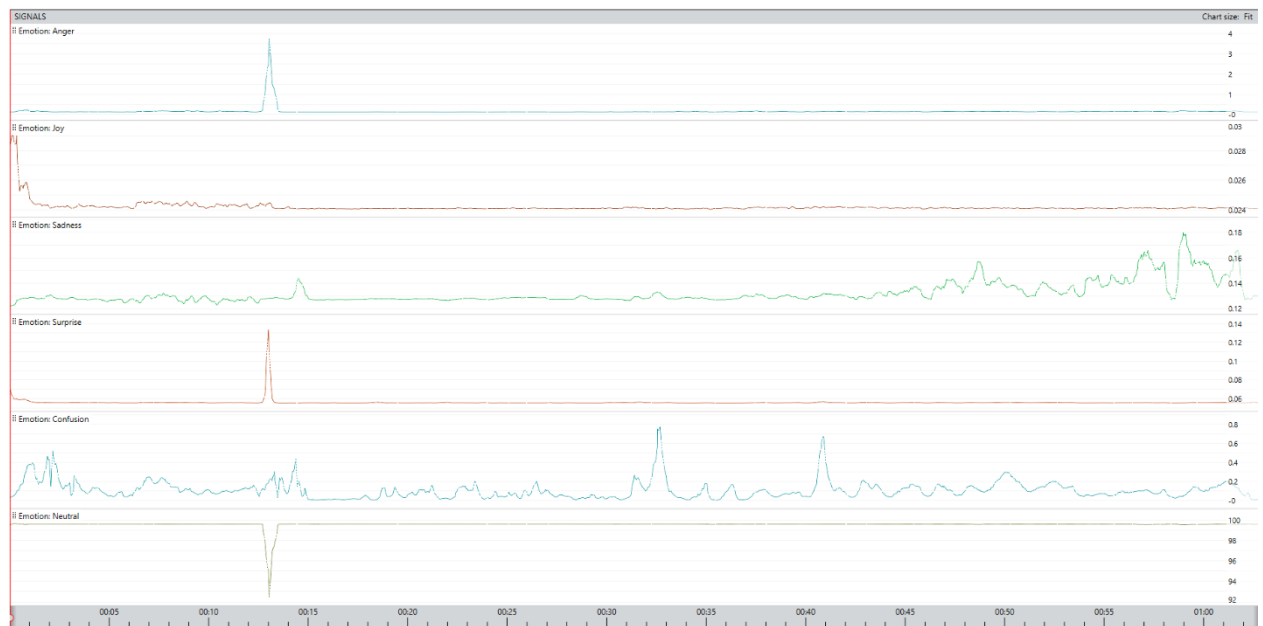
Participant 8: Dove



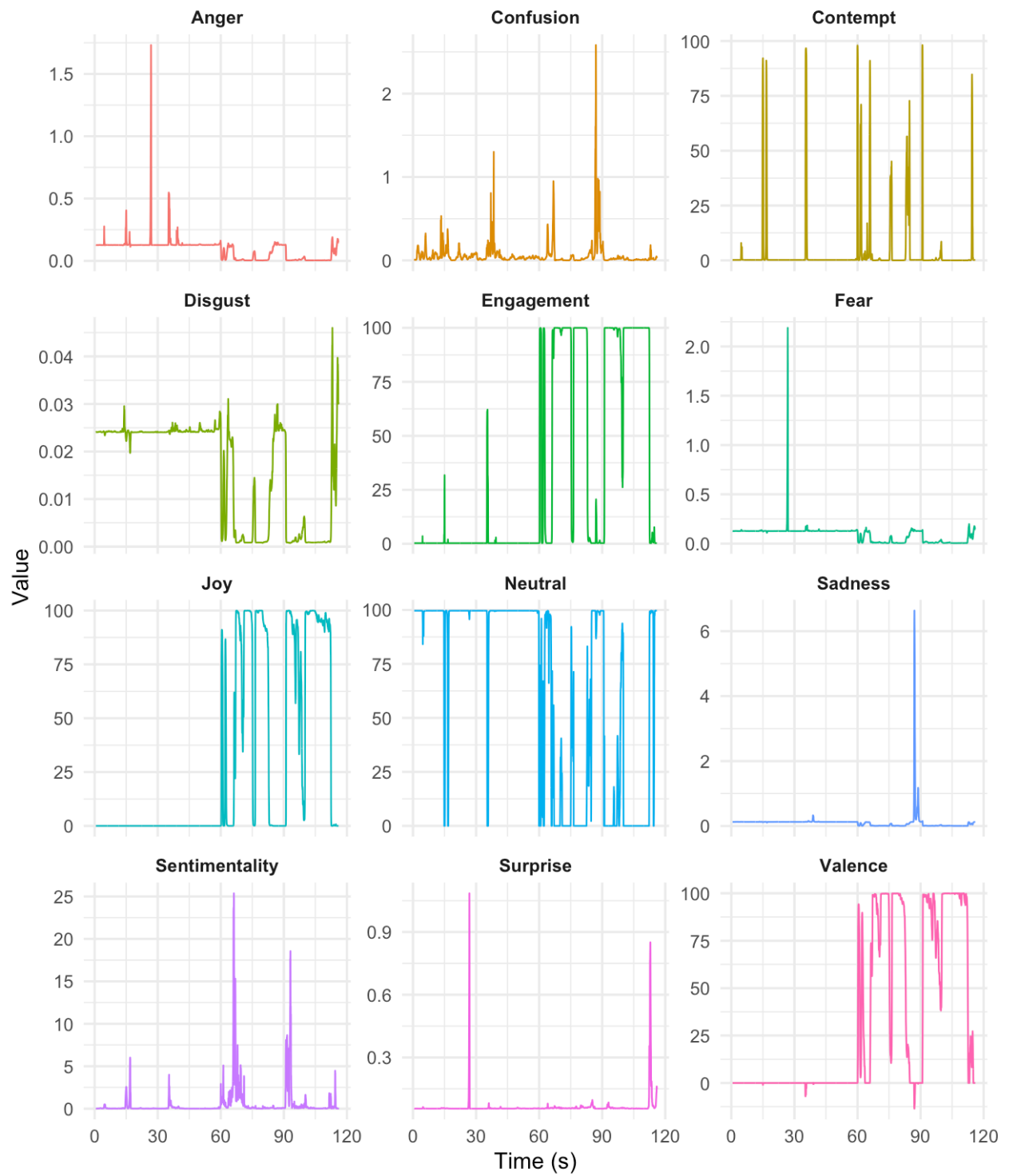


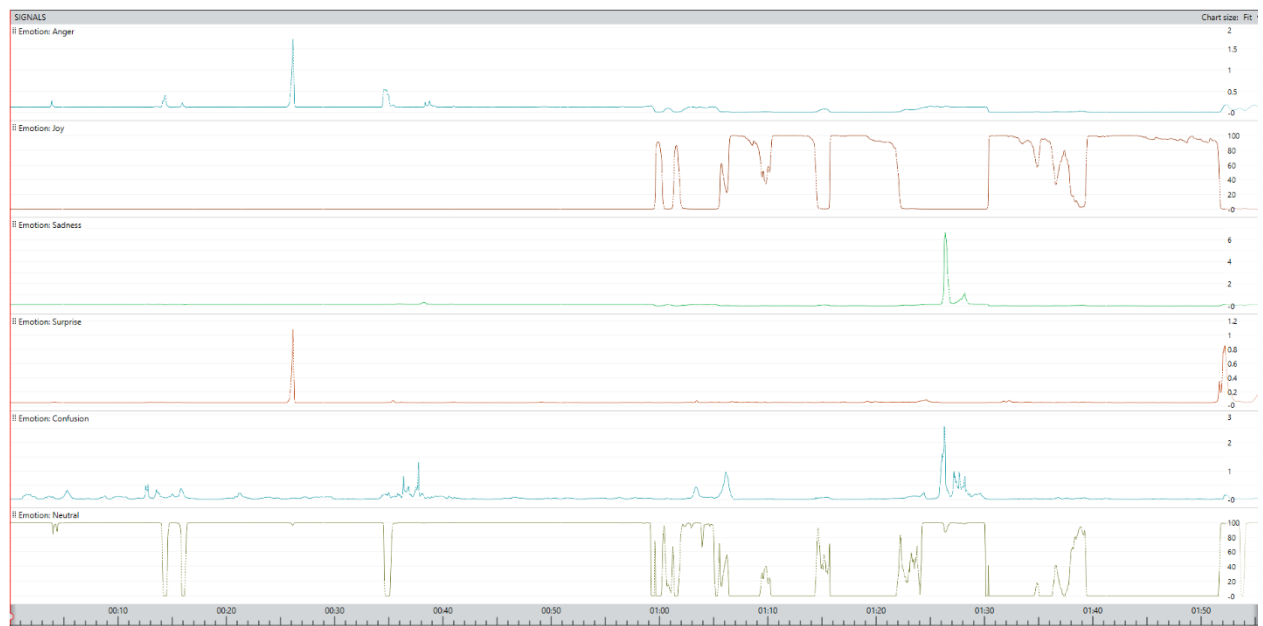
Participant 8: Rare Beauty



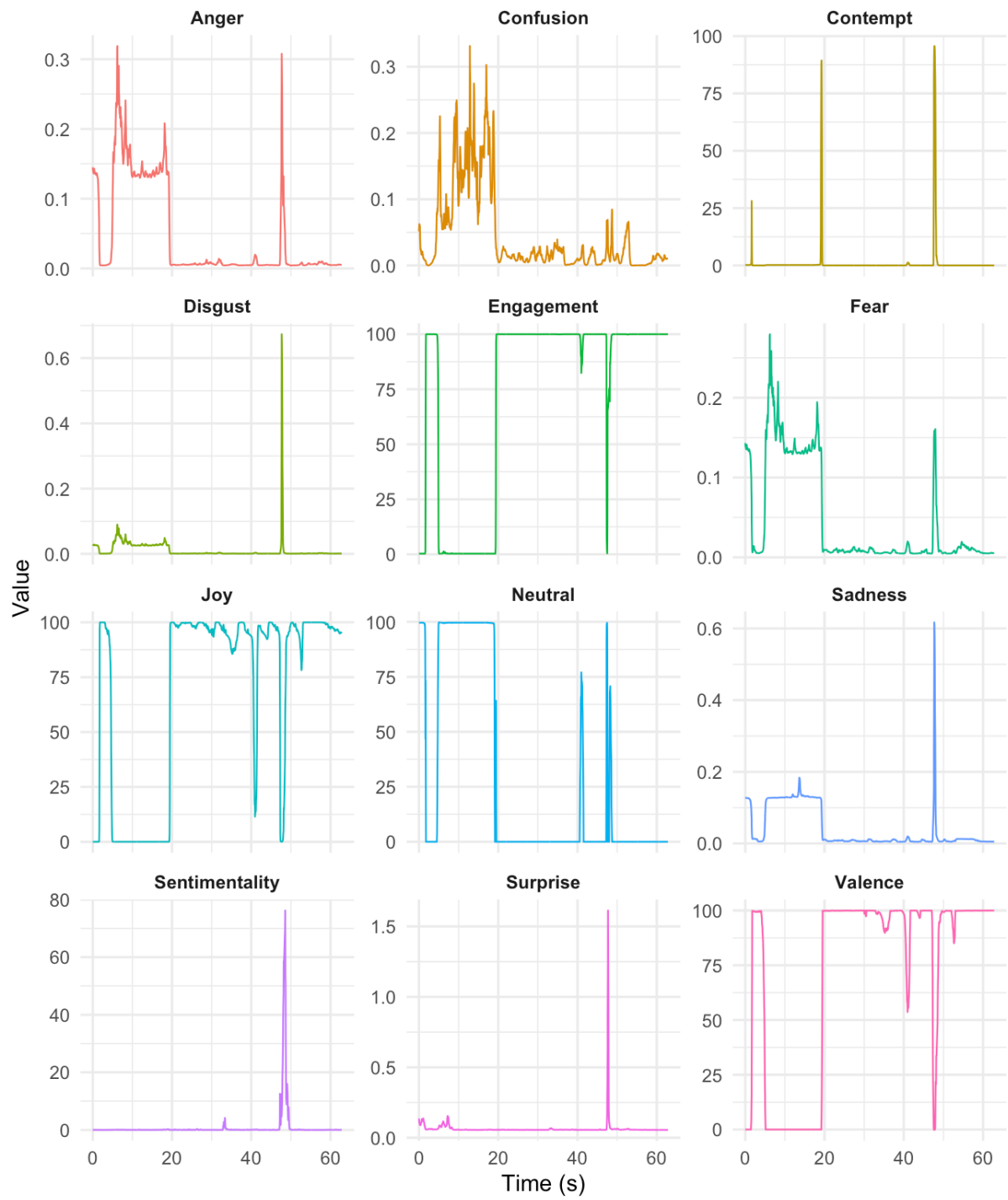


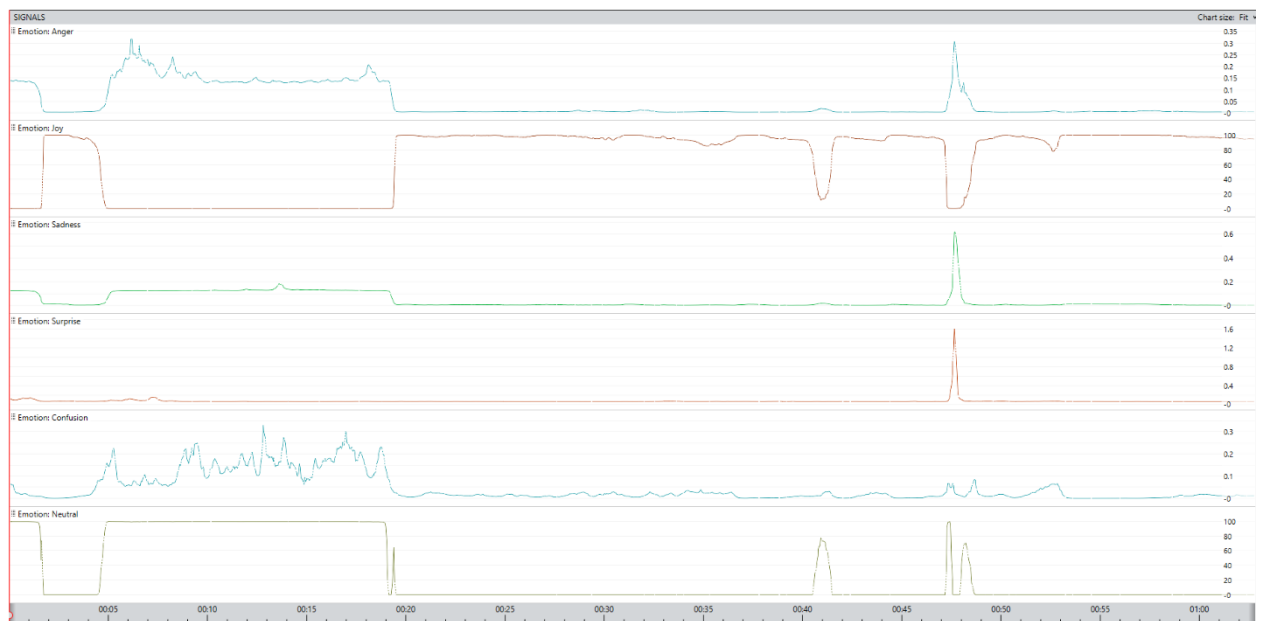
Participant 9: Dove



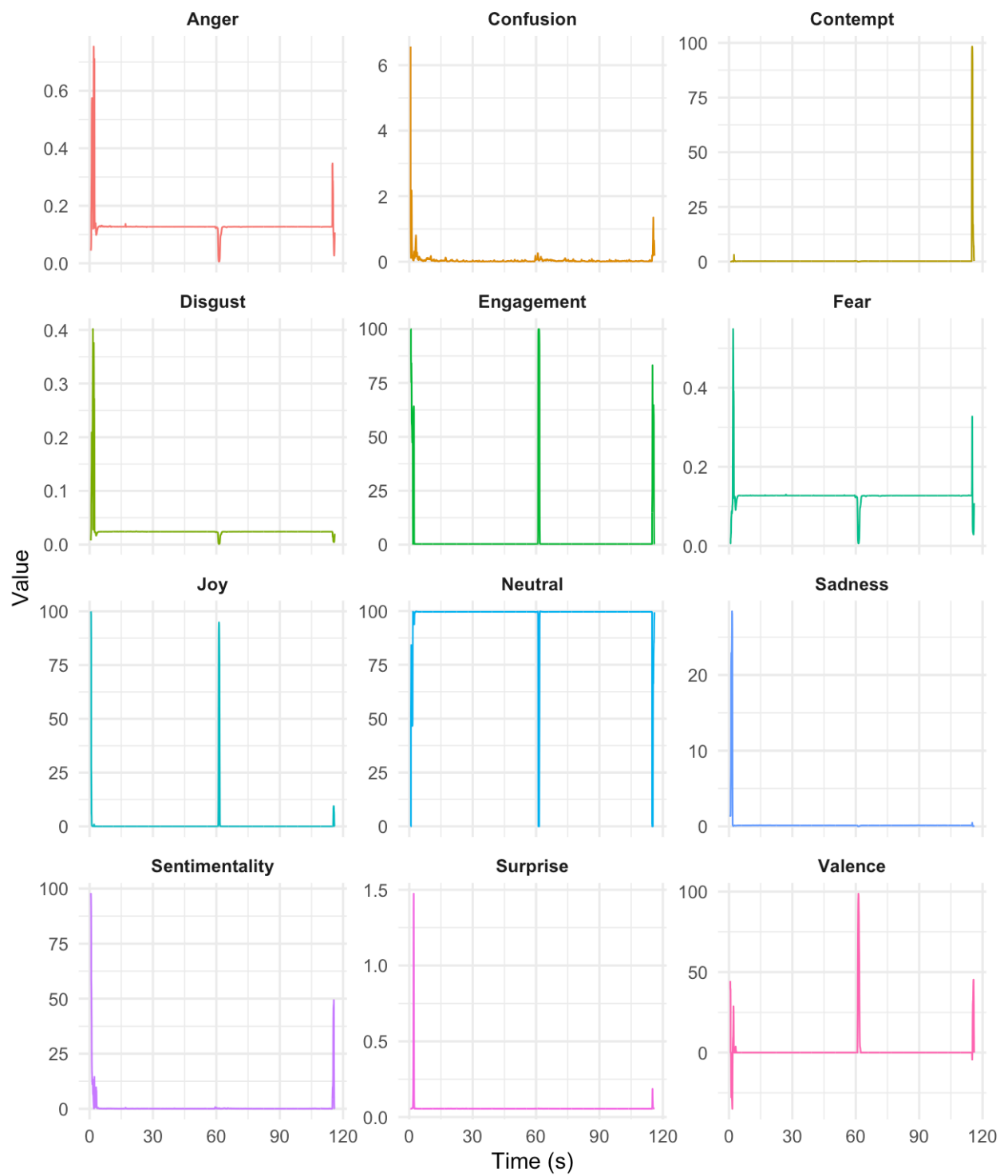


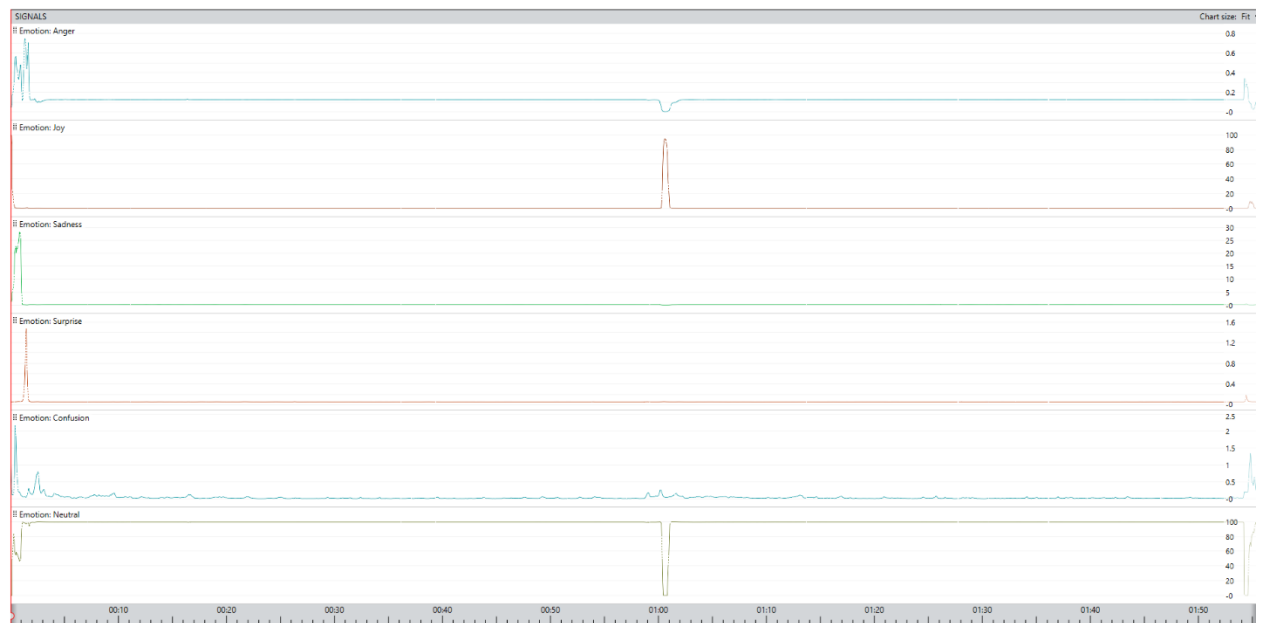
Participant 9: Rare Beauty



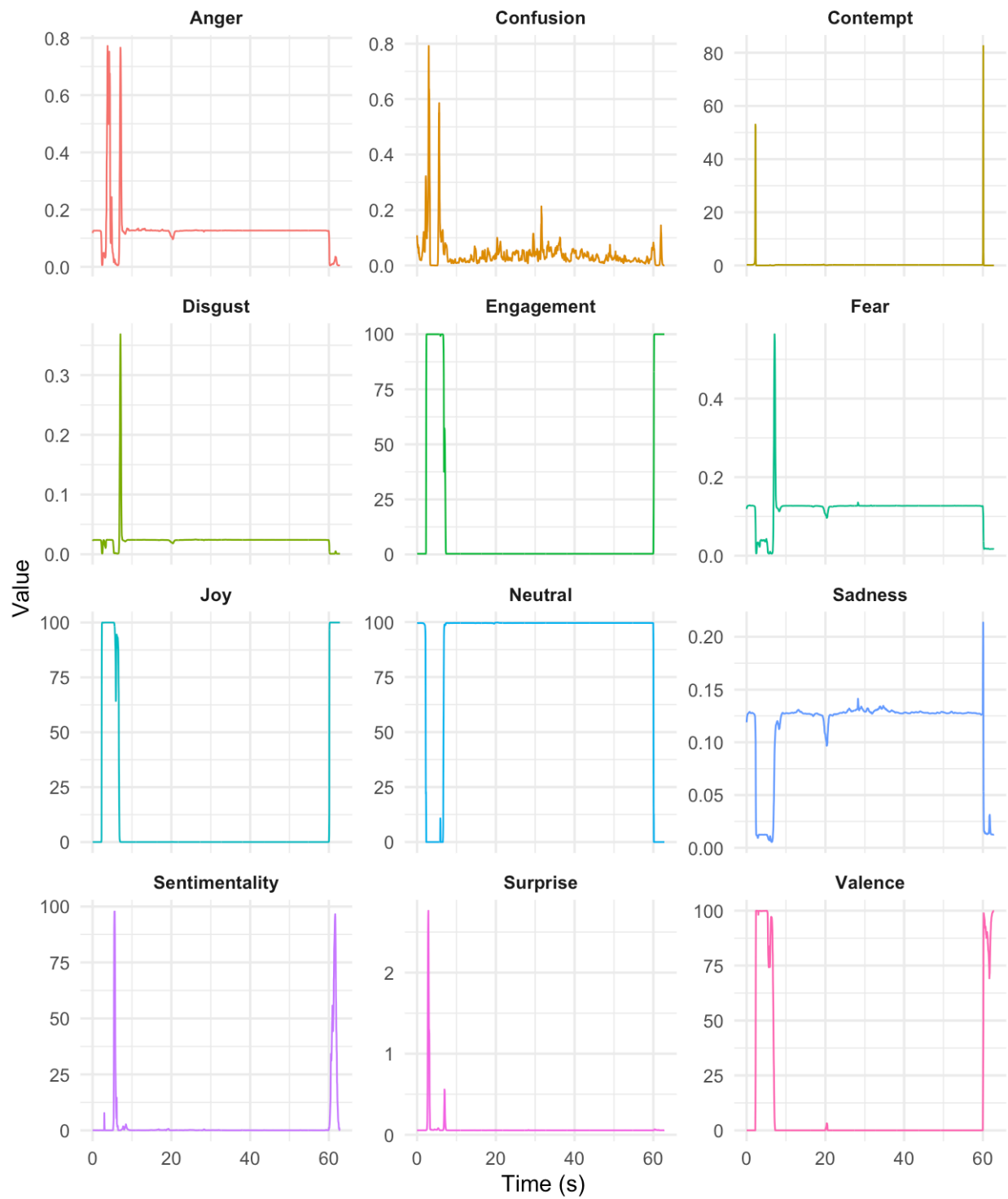


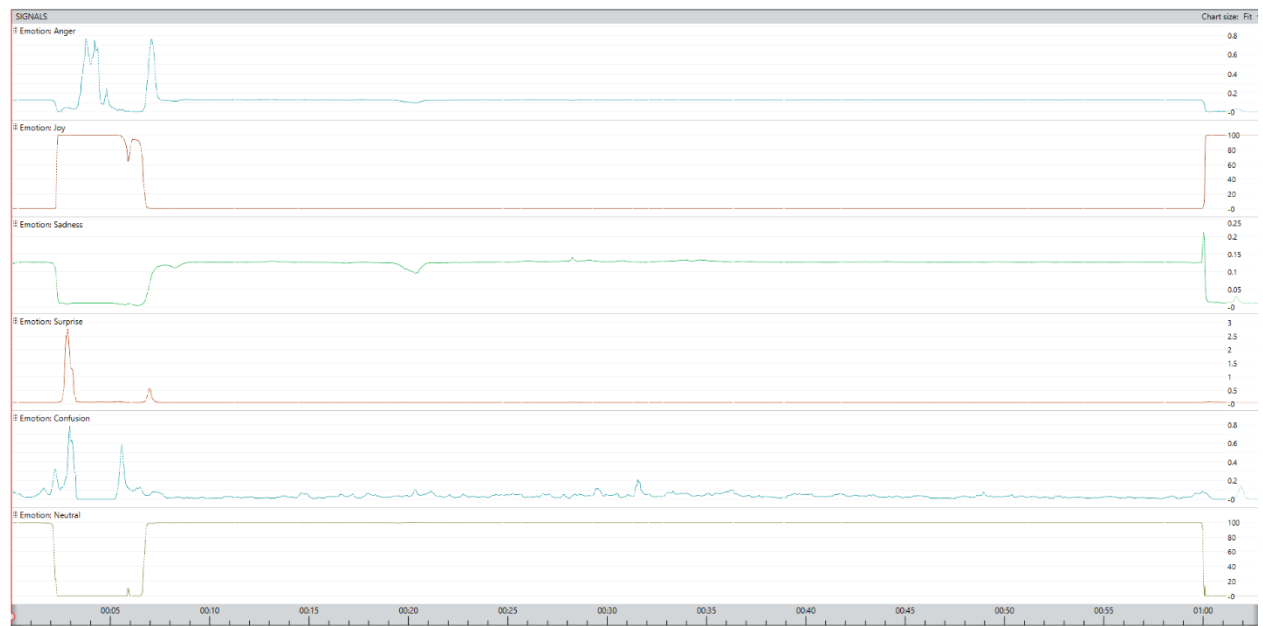
Participant 10: Dove



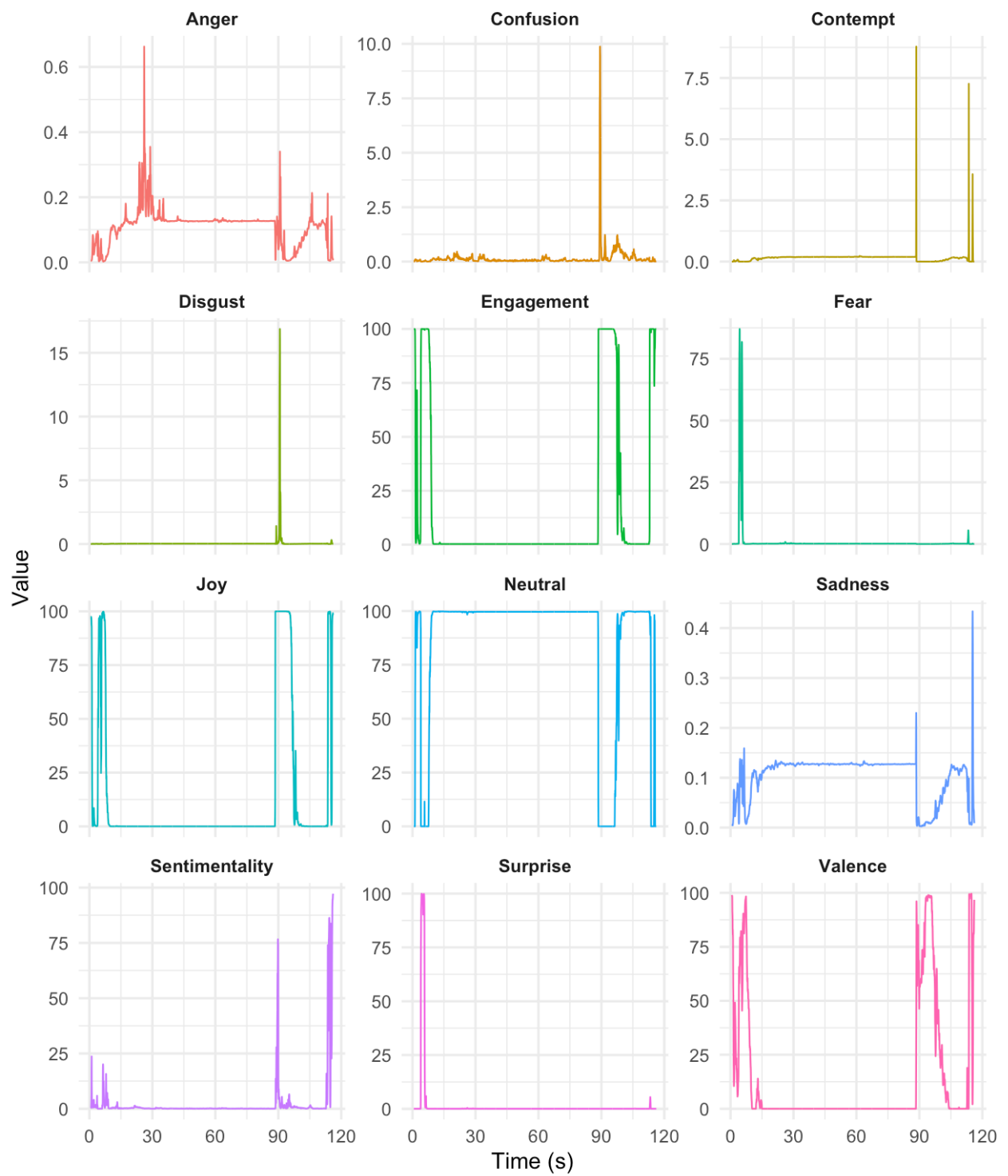


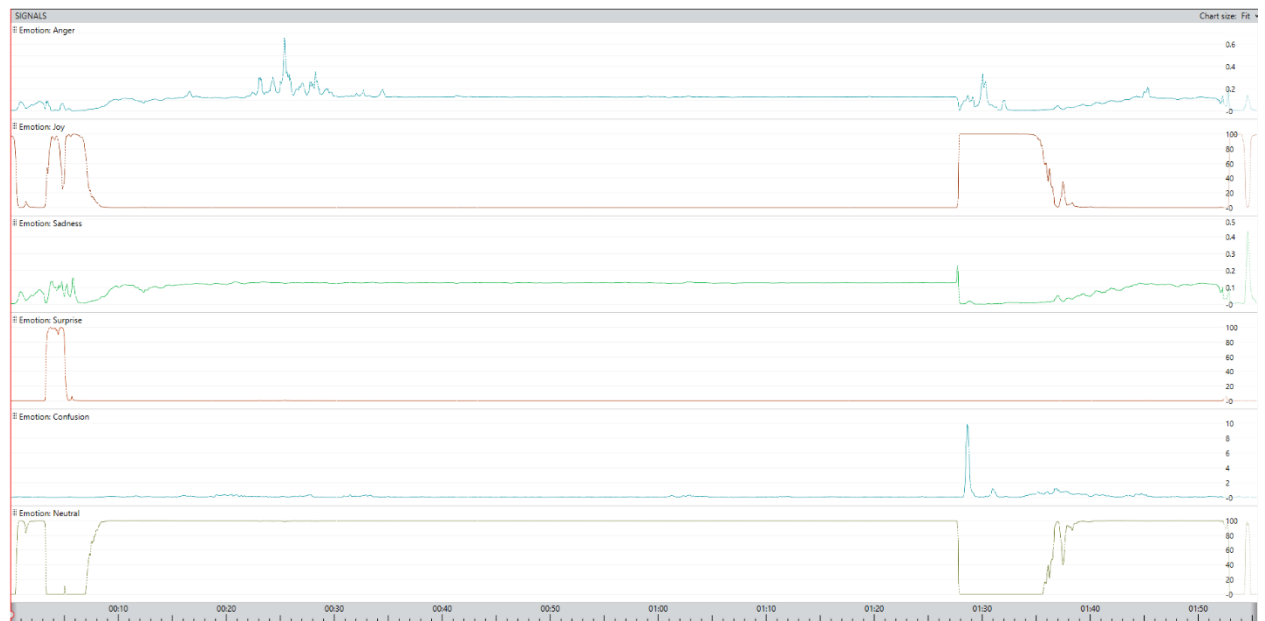
Participant 10: Rare Beauty



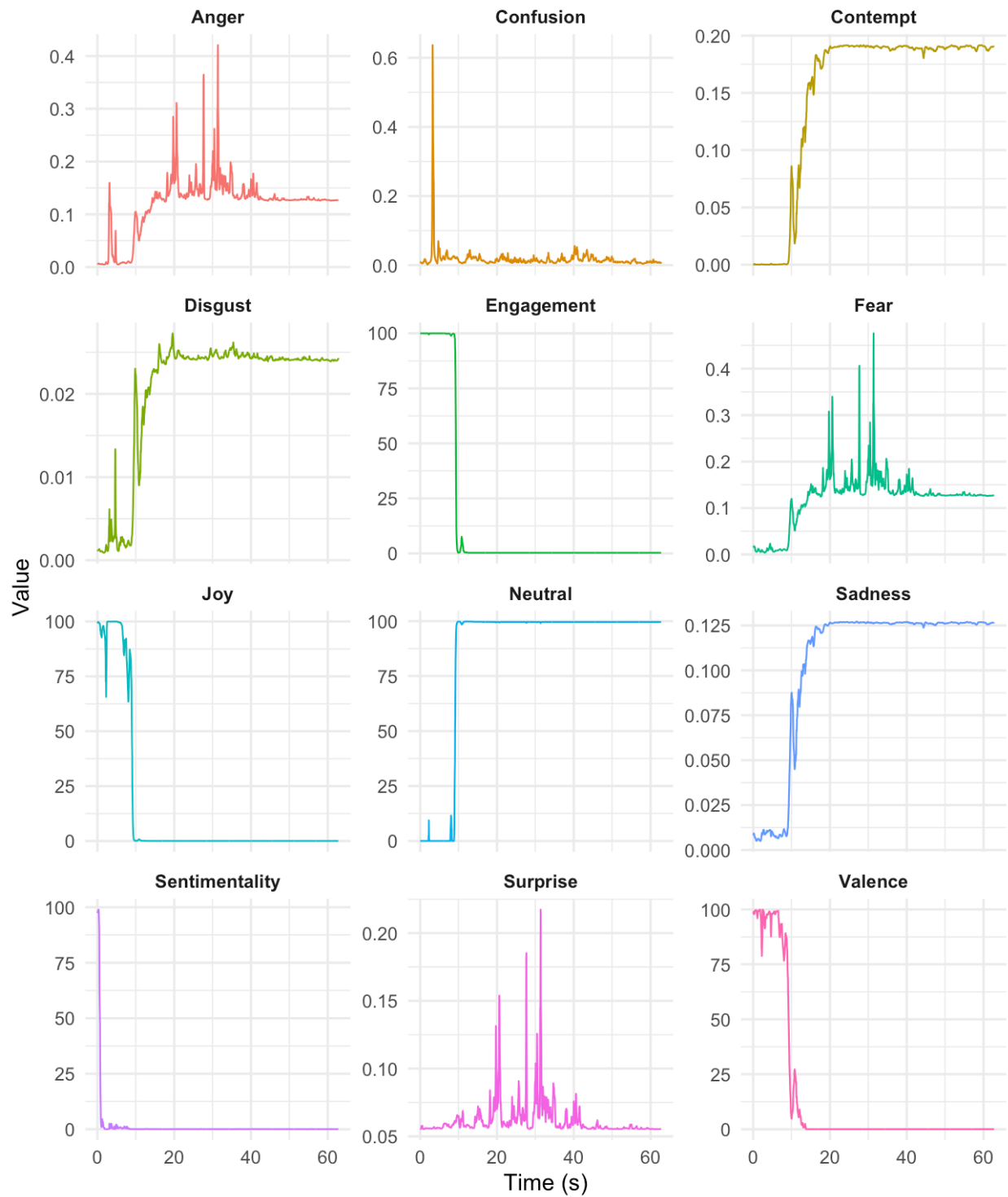


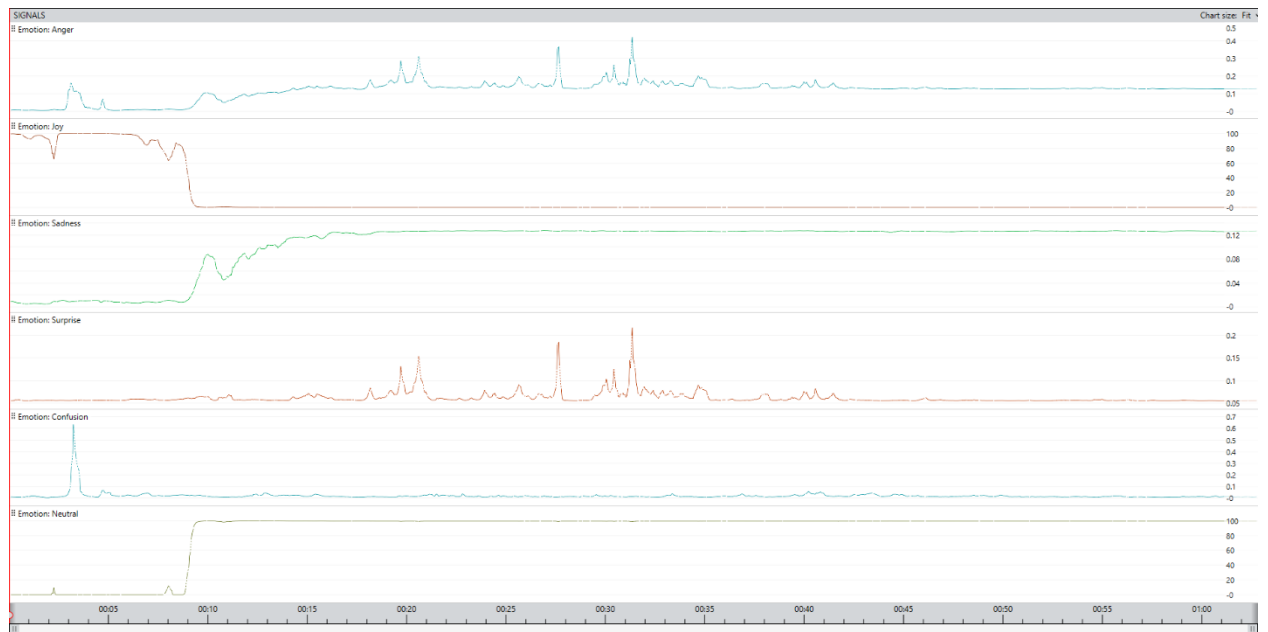
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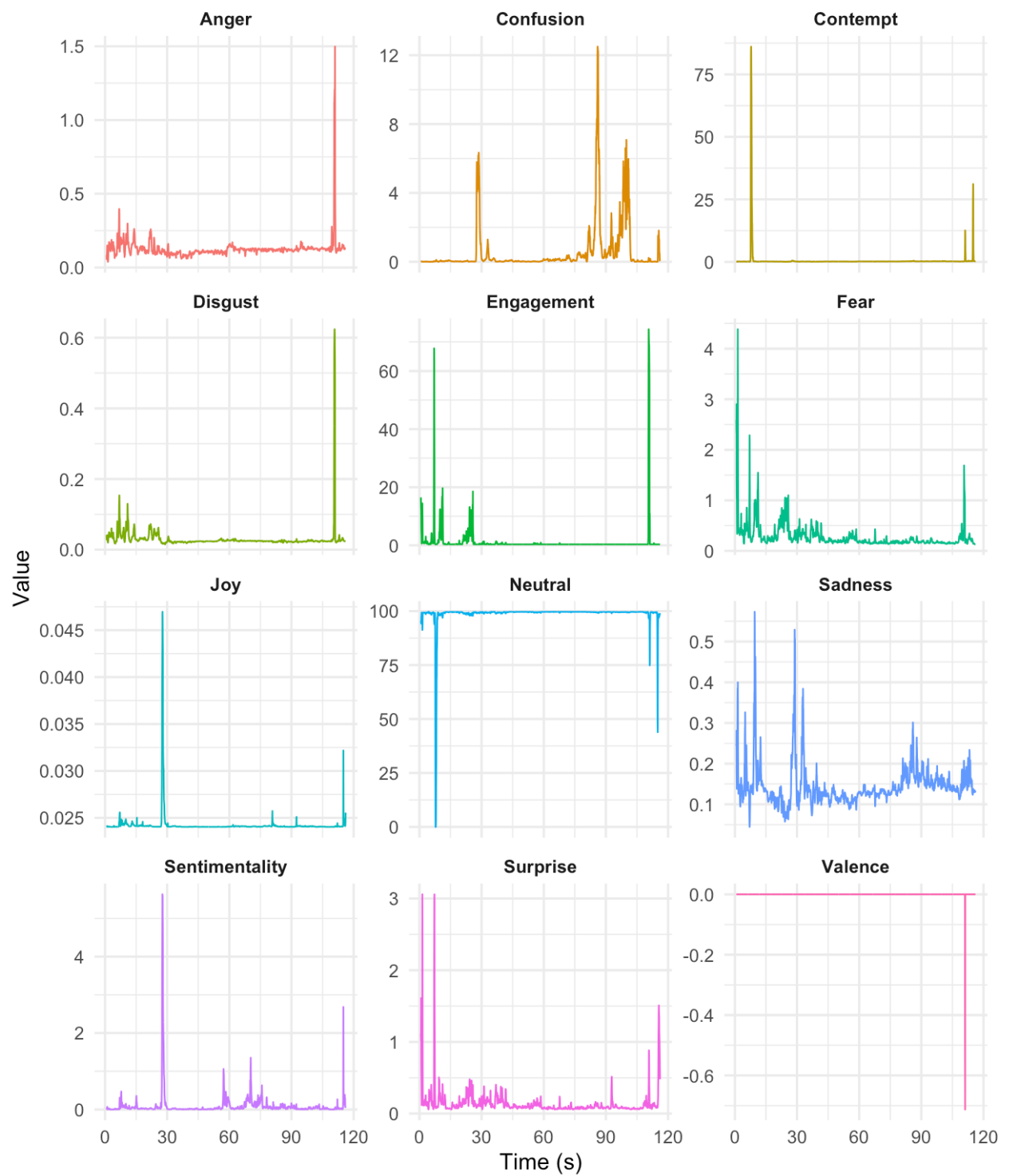


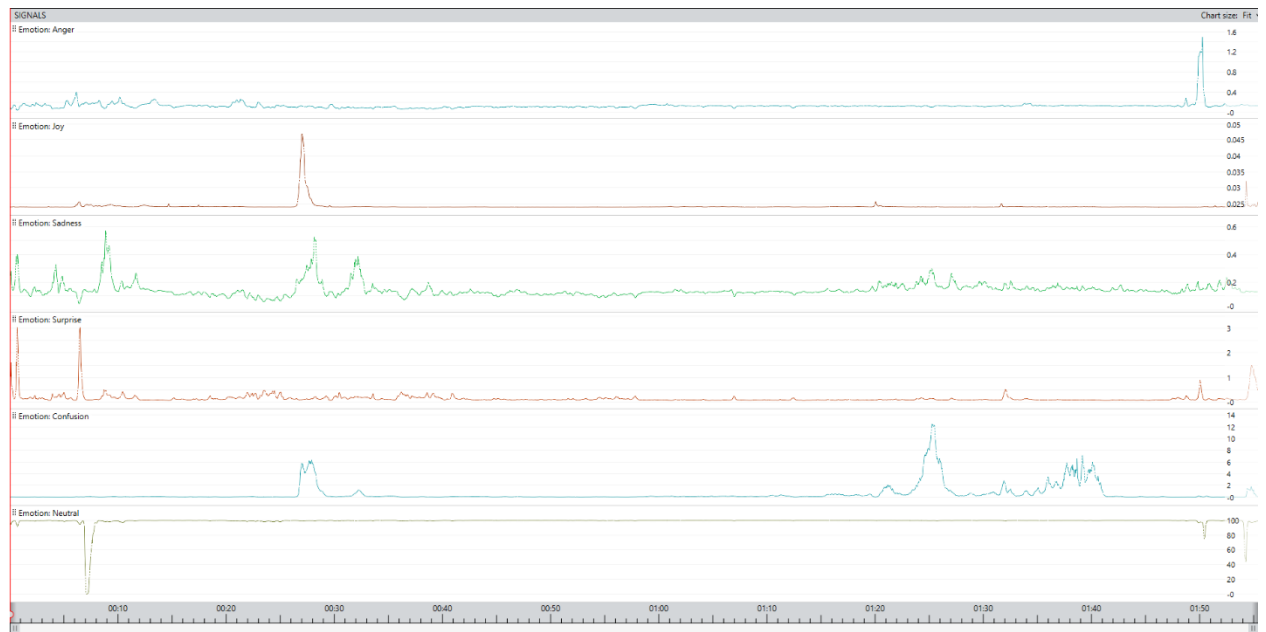
Participant 11: Rare Beauty



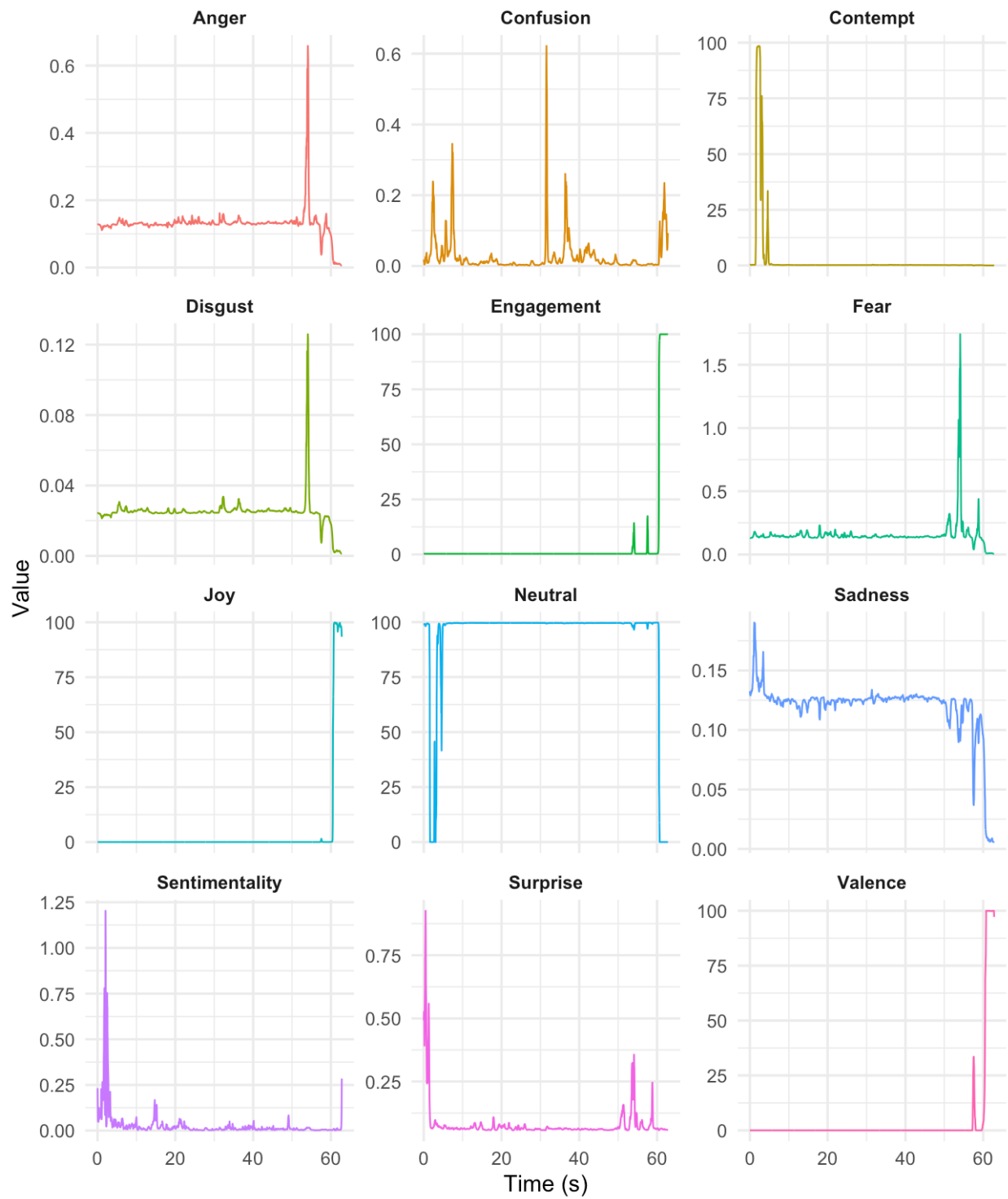


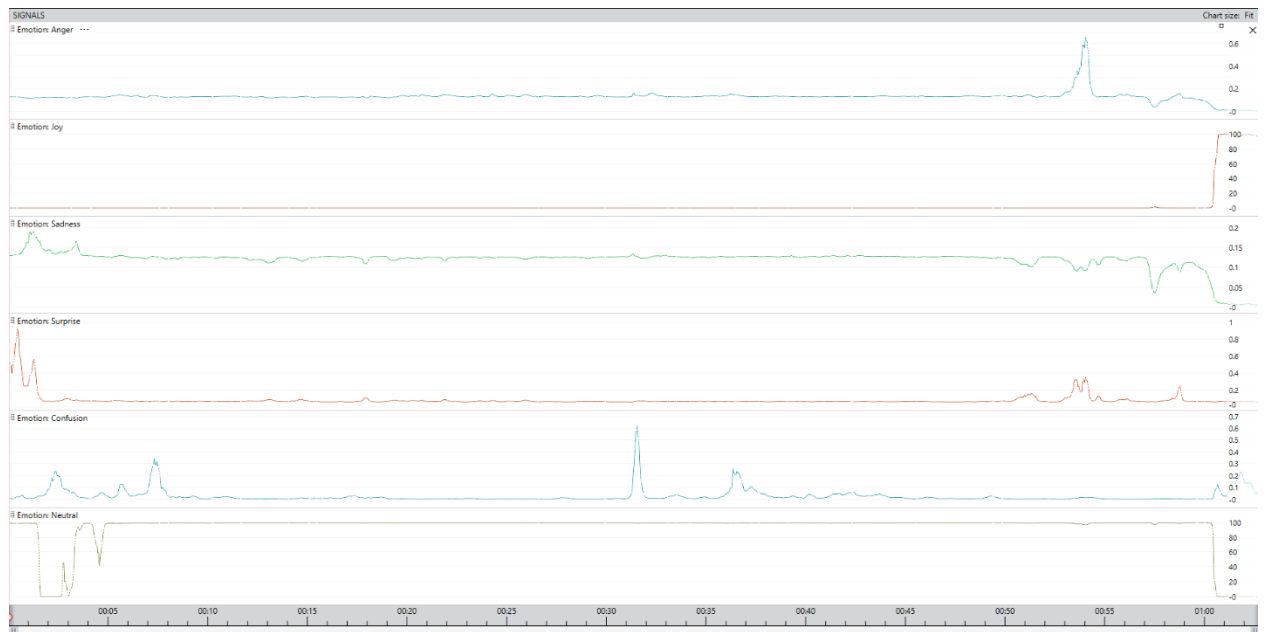
Participant 12: Dove



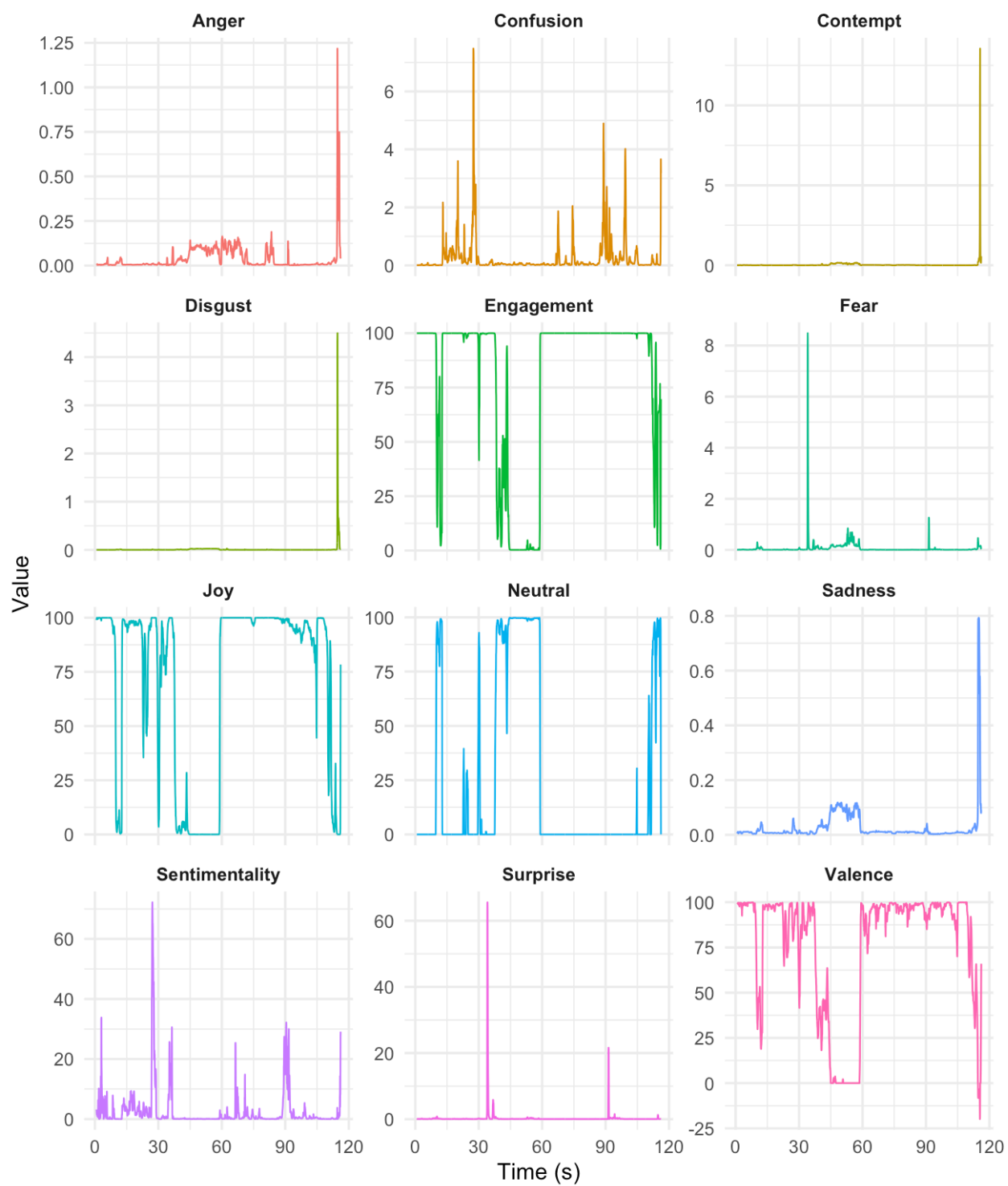


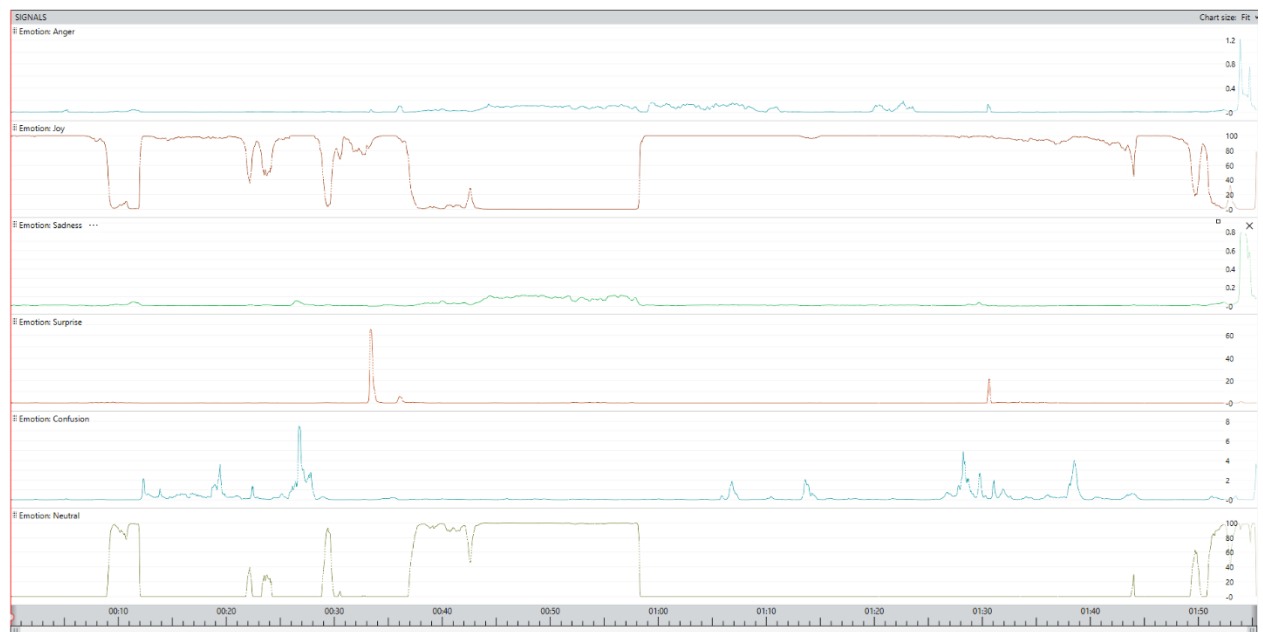
Participant 12: Rare Beauty



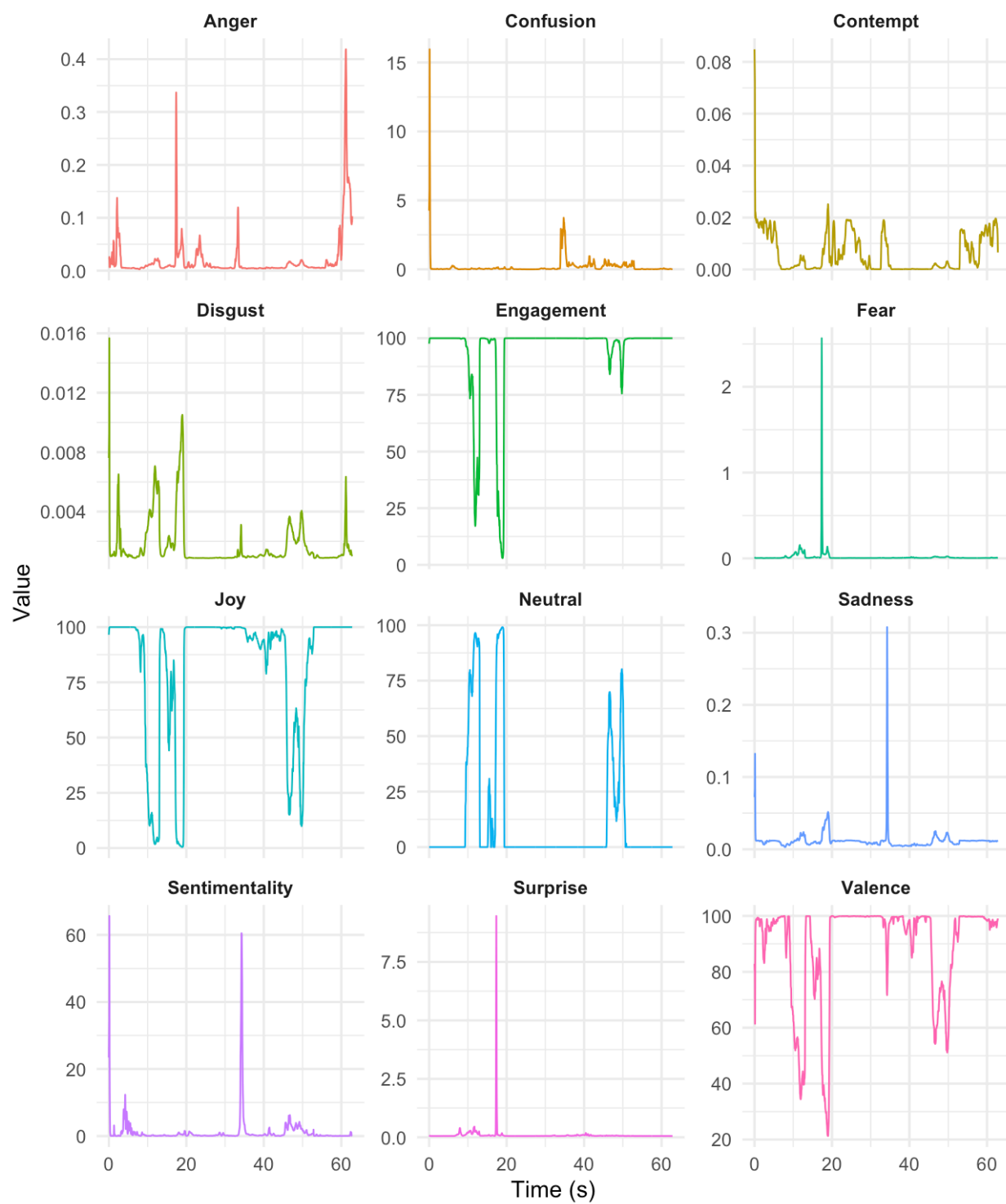


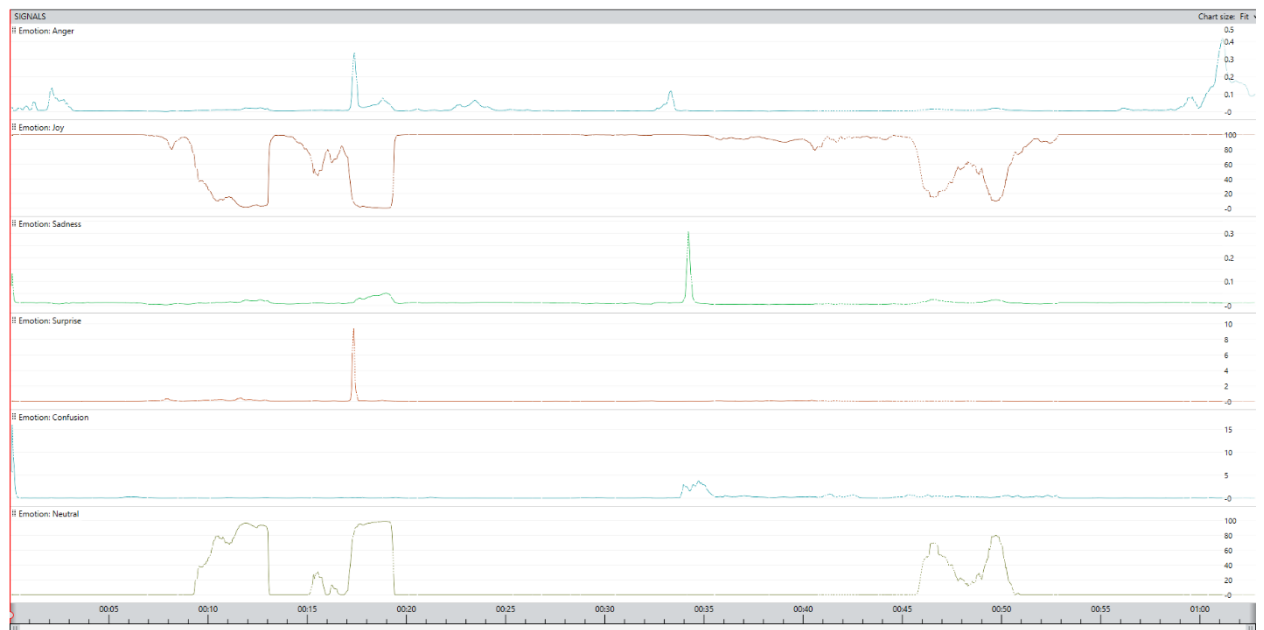
Participant 13: Dove





Participant 13: Rare Beauty





Appendix 4: Figures

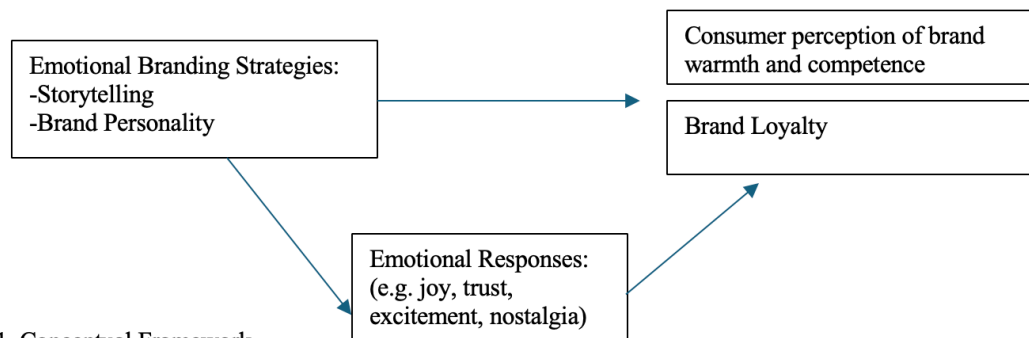


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

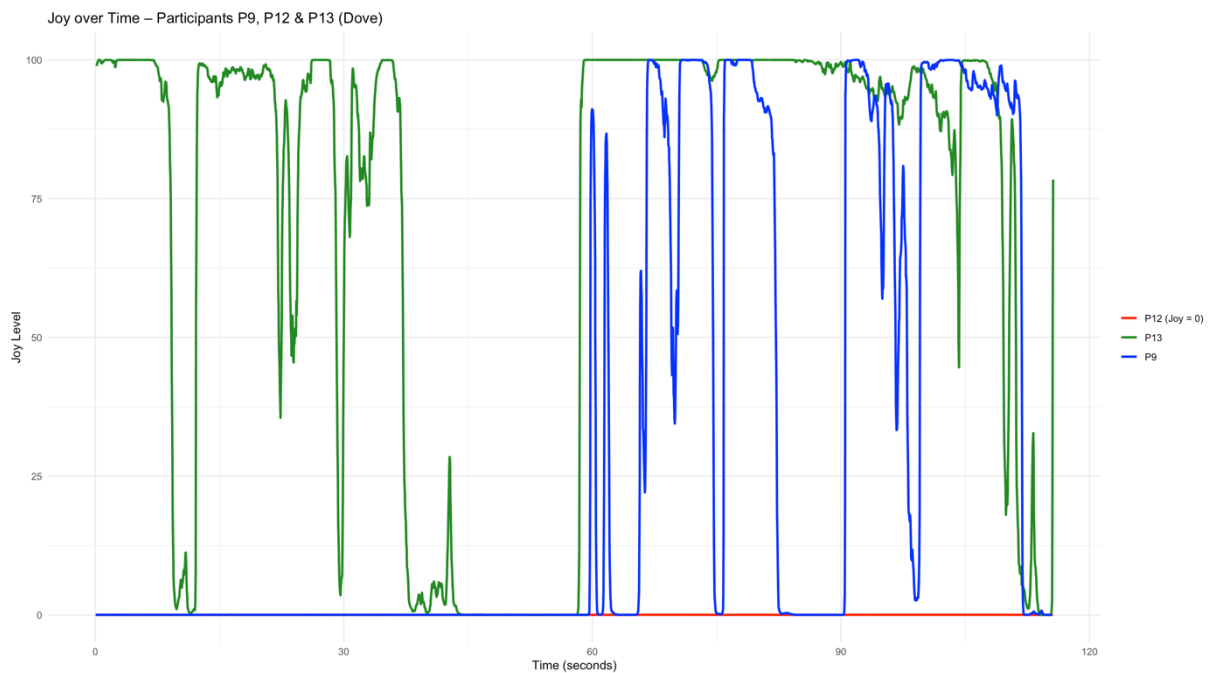


Figure 2. Joy over Time (0–120s) for Participants P9 (blue), P12 (red), and P13 (green) during the Dove Advertisement.

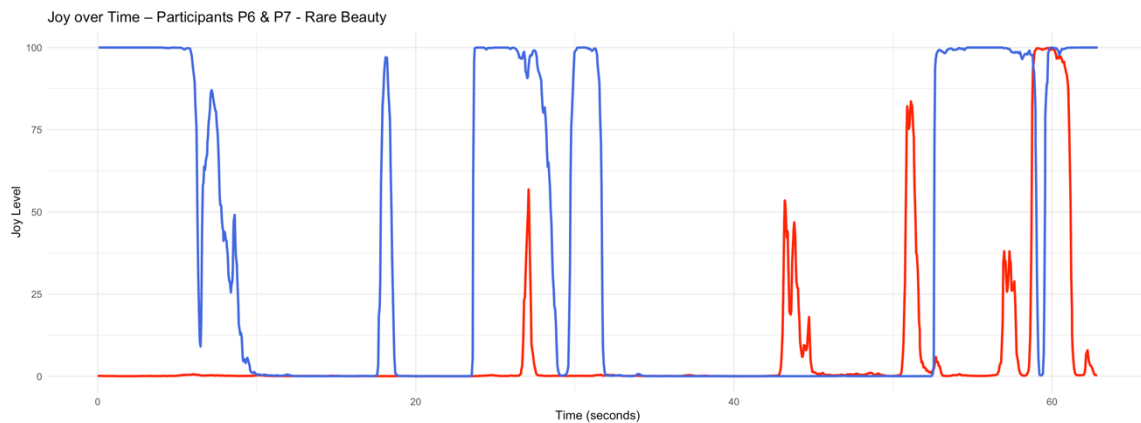


Figure 3. Joy over Time (0–65s) for Participants P7 (blue), and P6 (red) during the Rare Beauty Advertisement.

Appendix 5: Tables

Participants (P) Affective Responses to “Dove” and “Rare Beauty” Advertisements

Participant	Dominant Affective Reaction (Dove)	Relevant Co-Reactions (Dove)	Interview Insights (Dove)	Dominant Affective Reaction (Rare Beauty)	Relevant Co-Reactions (Rare Beauty)	Interview Insights (Rare Beauty)
			Participant was asked, if any emotions were felt:			Participant was asked, if any emotions were felt:
P1	Joy	Sentimentality: Frequent moderate-to-high peaks, especially between 20–90 seconds Surprise: A few strong spikes (e.g., around second 25 and 85) Fear Around second 30, when AI generated women appear Confusion: Repeatedly appear	<i>“In the beginning a bit of anger [...] in the end I felt some compassion for the kid and the woman but also felt happy for them.”</i>	Joy	Sentimentality: Notable peaks in second half	<i>“In the end [...] not really a feeling but it was nice to see all the different types of women smiling next to each other so maybe happy.”</i>
P2	Joy	Sentimentality: High peaks and frequent occurrences Surprise: A few sharp spikes around 40 seconds	<i>“I think when they show the real looking person, you could actually relate to, you feel kind of included.”</i>	Joy	None	<i>“Yes in the end. They show all the different women and they all seemed confident in their own ways [...] Joy. I was happy while watching it.”</i>
P3	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>“I would say for the second part, bit happier, because at first they showed like perfect woman so that would get me down because you're looking at something seen as perfect and think I'm not going to be like that. So you get a bit sad and down. And the second part is more like hey, those people are like me, they look happy with themselves, so I can be happy with myself too.”</i>	Anger (low value but most dominant)	Joy: High value of joy towards the end of the video	<i>“No, this one less than the other one [...] but I think I liked this ad a little more than the first one, because it actually shows real people and how they feel, and what makes them feel better.”</i>
P4	Joy	Sentimentality: Repeated peaks, especially around second 60 and 90 Contempt: Several high spikes	<i>“I was quite confused. At the beginning, because there was a lot of AI and I would</i>	None / Flat emotional response	Joy: Present only in first and last few seconds	<i>“I don't know. I don't really feel much. It was a weird ad because I feel like it was a bit fake [...] I was</i>

			<i>say beauty standards that people mostly have, but then afterwards when all the diversity came into it was quite nice to see that they interpreted the beauty standard differently and more aligning with what is normal.</i>			<i>confused by it, but I don't really think I felt any other emotions.</i>
P5	Fear: Frequent and clearly higher than any other basic emotion	Surprise: Spike at around 20 seconds	<i>"I think maybe the part where they showed the billboard and then the woman with the kid looking at the billboard, I was happy. Other than that not really"</i>	None	None	<i>"Not specifically like it was nice to see all the women together, but I can't call out the specific emotion."</i>
P6	Joy: Very high values in the second part of the video	Sentimentality	<i>"Because a lot of people were actually smiling, it gave off this feeling of happiness. You could see that they were happy with their bodies."</i>	Joy	Sentimentality: Frequent low-to-moderate peaks throughout	<i>"I would say it make me feel happy because they were all cheering together or like posing and having fun."</i>
P7	Joy	Contempt: Several high spikes Sentimentality: Repeated, high peaks especially at the beginning of the advertisement	<i>"It is quite unfortunate with seeing all these unrealistic beauty standards. So it did make me feel a bit sad. And then to see that Dove has a different look on beauty and tries to spread it was really nice."</i>	Joy	Contempt: Multiple sharp spikes Sentimentality: High early peaks	<i>"I think it was nice [...] but for some reason it felt unauthentic like an actual ad."</i> <i>"Uncomfortable in a way, because it kind of felt like they were using emotional branding as a marketing tool instead of a connecting tool or an expressing tool."</i>
P8	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>"I think when I first saw the perfect woman, I felt a bit maybe self-conscious. Automatically comparing myself to them a little bit and seeing the</i>	None / Flat emotional response	None	<i>"To be honest, not really."</i>

			<i>beauty standards and then. And then the second part was really almost relieving.</i> “			
P9	Joy Very high values in the second part of the video; No joy in the first part	Contempt: Several high spikes Sentimentality: Repeated peaks	“The beginning made me a bit sad but then the second part made me relieved or happy maybe also more comfortable.”	Joy	Contempt: Two major peaks	“I was quite happy through the whole advertisement because they used very cool colors, and everyone was laughing all the time it was very dynamic, but I think emotional itself not really.”
P10	Joy: very strong spike up to 100 midway through the video; it's brief, it's the highest emotional responses	None	“I think it was more when there was a woman and a child. I was like, oh, cute. At the beginning I was a bit confused when they showed the AI pictures.”	None	Joy: Only high at the beginning and towards the end	“Maybe the first part made me happy because it was with fun colors and beautiful people, but I am not sure if it was emotional like that.”
P11	Joy: Only at the beginning and towards the end otherwise none/flat emotional responses	Sentimentality: Present towards the end	“Not really. I couldn't really relate to what they showed.”	None	Joy: Although only present at the beginning	“Not really. It was nice to watch but no emotions.”
P12	None / Flat emotional response	None	“No, I just like the message. It's just, nice. But then I wasn't really touched or anything.”	None / Flat emotional response	None	“I guess maybe a little, seeing the black girl definitely helped. I was happy. And she even had an African accent. She didn't have an American accent, which is what most brands do. They want to be diverse but don't do it authentically”
P13	Joy	Sentimentality: Repeated peaks with higher peaks in the beginning of the video	“I definitely felt a sense of joy and satisfaction while watching the ad. It gave me the impression that they're genuinely trying to reflect what daily life looks like for everyone, while staying	Joy	Sentimentality	“Emotionally, what stood out to me the most was the moment when everyone smiled and seemed so happy and giggly, I really liked that.”

			<i>true to their values."</i>			
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Table 1

Participants (P) Affective Responses to the Dove and Rare Beauty Advertisements

Gioia Method

Quote	First-Order Concept	Second-Order concepts	Aggregate Dimension
"they're trying to communicate that they somehow care about their customers and not only sell products. [...] it's positive"	Appreciating brands that demonstrate care for customers beyond selling		
"Normally I start following them because of their ads, or for example because [...]they behave a certain way [...]and care about customers. So, it's important for me what they do and show."	Being drawn to brands that act considerately and communicate care		
"I think I do care. I think I also care about what values they try to show if they do vegan or animal testing and things like that."	Evaluating emotional branding by whether it aligns with personal values		
"I think so. They are clever and they're advertising[...] For me, it often helps if there's like other people also saying how great it is in the advertisements, and they seem reliable."	Trusting ads more when positive opinions from others are included in the ad		
"I think I do. I do use Lush for example because the way that they communicate is that they are sustainable, but also a little bit more on the genuine side where they allow you to try their products without having the commitment to buy it and the whole idea of it being a family and catering to you as an individual while getting you involved in their process[...] also celebrities like Selena Gomez or Rihanna, where they genuinely put themselves in the shoes of the customers[...] I think that's very impactful as well and appealing."	Valuing brands that communicate sustainability and inclusiveness in a genuine, personal way	Emphasizing Customer Care & Values	Emotional Branding Strategies
"I want to get everything that I basically see there if it is related to a nice story or post or reel. So if I feel like a brand has like a	Feeling urged to buy when brand storytelling is emotionally engaging	Emotional Storytelling & Narrative	

good story behind their products I feel like buying their products."			
"I do see people smiling a lot and always being like, oh, hey, this is a good product. I use this a lot. It is very prominent instead of just a product."	Noticing emotional expressions in ads that present products as part of a joyful lifestyle		
"It makes the product more than just a product. So you feel more connected to the product because you heard a story for example."	Feeling emotionally attached to a product through storytelling		
"Probably when it's a very vulnerable story filled with a lot of emotions that I can relate to"	Being most impacted by emotionally vulnerable stories one can personally relate to		
"I would say so, because with emotional branding, you're touching on something deeper[...] like you say something, and the person thinks, "Oh, they're talking about me."	Perceiving emotional branding as powerful when it feels personally directed		
"I think most products where I see the ads I already know, so if they would only show the product I wouldn't care much, but if I see a nice ad with a story or feelings that I then connect to the brand I am probably also more likely interested in the products or at least more than if I only see the product."	Developing stronger interest in products through emotionally rich brand storytelling		
"I think it feels powerful to me when it really can evoke an emotion, not just trying to connect with everyone in the world, but they really connect to their target audience. So like more tailored to me and not just a lot of people in general."	Responding more strongly to emotionally tailored messages aimed at a specific target group	Relatable, Personalized Content	
"I feel that an ad would be powerful to me if it's authentic, maybe if it shows values or feelings that I can combined with what I'm feeling[...] also maybe when it shows situations in a daily life that I can relate to[...] so I think in general if it's like more tailored to me and just resonates with myself and the way I think and behave."	Feeling impacted by ads that authentically reflect one's own emotions and daily life		

"I think if I can connect it to my own personal life, so if it resembles personal experience, I think it can affect you more than when it's something you cannot really relate to."	Being more emotionally affected by ads that resemble personal experiences		
"Yes, for example, there's a lot with body positivity or diversity[...]I don't want to say it's too much because it is important but it's very repetitive[...]It's always the same[...] it's good to see diversity, but it's also nothing special anymore."	Recognizing the value of diversity messaging while feeling fatigued by its repetitive use	Inclusive & Empowering Messaging	
"Perhaps the being unique, that's a bit overused by a lot of makeup brands or cosmetic brands, but I do still appreciate it."	Appreciating empowerment messages despite their overuse in cosmetic branding		
"Overused, maybe some you notice with brands often[...]they really want to focus on the diversity thing, and they overly use that and sometimes I even get kind of annoyed because it is just too much and gets boring."	Feeling annoyed by the excessive and repetitive use of diversity themes in branding		
"focusing on the diversity part[...]in general it's a good thing[...]but I feel like most of the brands do it the same way[...]this is a bit overused but I wouldn't say that this is then also inauthentic because[...]if the brand actually stands for what they are saying[...]then I think it's authentic[...] there are some brands that say they are diverse and then they do not include very dark shades[...] then I would say it's inauthentic[...]but if they say they do it and then they have a wide range of products for different skin types then I would say it's authentic."	Noticing when brands actually mean their diversity message and calling it out when it feels fake		
"I think the way of trying to show diversity[...]it's used a lot and at some point it's like ok, we get it that you try to be diverse."	Perceiving diversity messaging as overcommunicated and losing its persuasive impact		

"I don't know if it's bad, but it's I think every brand is saying be you, you're enough, you're beautiful[...]It's not bad, but the same thing[...] maybe there are other ways that they could stand out instead of using the same message"	Acknowledging the positive intent of empowerment messaging while questioning its distinctiveness due to overuse		
"The whole D&I trend with diversity and inclusion is definitely a trend[...]a lot of brands do it genuinely[...]but then there are some that just do it for the sake of it[...]in their products you can tell that they're not actually showing the range that caters to the different kind of consumers they are trying to go after using the trend."	Critically evaluating the authenticity of diversity messaging based on whether product offerings reflect inclusive intent		
"I think if brands do it a lot, the importance decreases and then it's not worth it anymore because it seems forced and loses the impact"	Recognizing that frequent use of emotional messaging can reduce its perceived sincerity and effectiveness	Balanced Emotional Branding	
"I think both of it has to be nicely integrated[...]if it's too over the top on the emotion part then it kind of takes away focus from the product. So[...]a good mix[...]is nice."	Preferring a balanced integration of emotional appeal and product information in advertising		
"when they show the real looking person, you could actually relate to"	Relating more to brands that feature realistic and relatable people in their advertising	Feeling Included & Empowered by Representation	
"I would say included because I finally saw people that kind of look like me. So, I like that."	Feeling emotionally included when advertising reflects one's own identity		
"Made me feel also more comfortable because they seemed real."	Feeling more at ease with advertising that features people who appear authentic and relatable		
"Emotional, I would say for the second part bit happier, because at first they showed like perfect woman so that would get me down[...]thinking I'm not going to be like that[...]sad and down. And	Experiencing emotional uplift when advertising features relatable individuals instead of idealized beauty standards		

the second part is more like hey, those people are like me[...]they look happy with themselves, so I can be happy with myself too."			Emotional Responses
"I think when I first saw the perfect woman, I felt a bit maybe self-conscious[...]Automatically comparing myself[...]seeing the beauty standards[...]the second part was really almost relieving. Nicer to look at it."	Feeling relieved when advertising challenges unrealistic beauty standards by showing more relatable representations		
"What stood out to me the most was the moment when everyone smiled and seemed so happy"	Noticing positive emotional expressions as a key element that enhances the impact of advertising		
"Since it involves people, and people often even subconsciously are affected by seeing emotions, it has a real impact."	Believing that emotional expressions in advertising have subconscious influence and strong impact on viewers	Positive Emotional Resonance	
"I would say that it is very important unconsciously. So I would say I'm very prone for emotional things, so I think it does something with me unconsciously."	Recognizing that emotional advertising influences consumers on a subconscious level		
"Yes, I think so, because you automatically feel sympathetic toward the brand and maybe remember it better."	Forming positive emotional associations that enhance brand memory and likeability		
"I think if the message resonates with me I get more interested to actually watch the ad."	Engaging more with advertising when the message feels personally relevant		
"I feel like if you evoke a good feeling that I want to buy it. So if I see an ad and[...]I think, oh, this looks great, I want to buy that. But I am also really easily convinced and influenced."	Feeling more inclined to purchase when advertising evokes positive emotions		
"I usually don't take my emotions into consideration when buying a product and think more rationally"	Prioritizing rational decision-making over emotional influence when evaluating products		
"I wouldn't say no, of course subconsciously probably it will	Acknowledging the subconscious impact		

have an effect on me if someone is, like, happy using the product. For me it is more like, what's the quality behind it?"	of emotions while emphasizing product quality as the main purchase driver	Skepticism and Rational Detachment	
"I also don't always believe what they're trying to give you as a viewer[...]I understand that they want to make me buy so I think I can look at brands without directly being influenced."	Demonstrating awareness of persuasive marketing strategies while maintaining critical distance from emotional influence		
"I have a general distrust for brands because I always know that behind this, there are a bunch of copywriters and a lot of people with nice words and stories to tell you stuff."	Expressing skepticism toward emotional branding due to its perceived strategic and constructed nature		
"It made them seem more caring and nicer but didn't change the way I see them as a brand"	Perceiving emotional branding as improving likeability without altering overall brand perception	Product Value Over Emotional Appeal	
"But when viewing ads online or viewing brand reputation... I would have a preference, but in a store when I'm not having the brand reputation directly in front of me and it's just the product, then I wouldn't say that that's the first thing my mind goes to."	Recognizing that emotional branding influences online preferences more than in-store decisions		
"It has to look genuine, not staged"	Emotional branding has to be genuine, not staged	Authentic Execution	
"I also don't always believe what they're trying to give you as a viewer[...]I understand that they want to make me buy so I think I can look at brands without directly being influenced."	Being aware of persuasive marketing tactics and maintaining critical distance from emotional influence		
"Maybe just uncomfortable[...]it kind of felt like they were using emotional branding as a marketing tool instead of a connecting tool or an expressing tool."	Feeling discomfort when emotional branding appears instrumental rather than sincere		
"And she even had an African accent[...]She didn't have an American accent, which is what most brands do. They want to be diverse but don't do it	Perceiving diversity as authentic when brands reflect cultural details realistically		

authentically. So that did feel very authentic to me."			Brand Perception
"Yes, I would say so. I think it's very difficult to create an ad that shows a lifestyle everyone can relate to[...]brands choose to stay on the safer, more neutral side, showing how a product can positively affect everyday life. I think that's impactful because it doesn't create unrealistic expectations[...]If an ad shows a lifestyle that feels out of reach, it might make you question whether you even need the product. But if the ad focuses on relatable, everyday situations, it's much easier to connect with and then I can see the value of the product more clearly."	Finding relatable, everyday portrayals more effective than aspirational but unrealistic lifestyles in advertising		
"I think knowing what Dove stands for[...]they did a great job responding to current media trends like AI or diversity[...]They used that trend in a clever way to reinforce their core values, showing that they're committed to staying genuine and human[...]appreciated how they balanced staying relevant with their strong message of authenticity"	Valuing when brands engage with trends to reinforce but not replace their authentic identity		
"Having the founder herself appear in the ad and speak so openly about the brand's purpose adds a lot of authenticity. She clearly shares that she has struggled with body image[...]and the fact that she's willing to be so vulnerable and genuine with the audience is truly admirable."	Perceiving brand communication as more authentic when leaders share personal, vulnerable experiences		
"If I were in a store[...] and saw that brand next to another one, I might be more likely to take a look."	Being more likely to notice a brand in-store after previous emotional exposure		
"If the brand or their ad seem different or special I am more interested in their products."	Feeling more drawn to products when a brand's messaging appears unique or distinctive		

"Probably not directly caring about, but I think it's sticking more into your head when it's more emotional and there is a story behind it."	Remembering emotionally framed ads better due to their narrative content	Memory and Brand Attention	
"I think it is probably more powerful, because[...] you pay more attention[...]you notice the brand a bit more[...]the fact that you take note of the brand more is probably what makes you maybe even unintentionally buy the thing."	Paying more attention to emotional ads, which can lead to unintended brand influence		
"I don't think that they influence me directly to buy something[...]but I do prefer some brands compared to others just based on[...]how they present themselves online or also because of the community they try to build[...]they don't directly make me buy something, but they push me towards a direction."	Being indirectly influenced by a brand's online presence and community-building efforts		
"I feel like relatability. If I feel like I can relate to the message, then it feels like I can relate to the brand and so maybe[...] make a purchase[...]or be on the lookout for the brand."	Being more inclined to engage with a brand when the message feels personally relatable		
"Yes, I think quite a lot, because that is something that works very efficiently to get someone's attention... especially when they have a dramatic degree... either very happy or very emotional, very sad... It works very efficiently also on myself."	Finding emotionally intense ads especially effective at capturing attention		
"Definitely the emotional ad because[...]it is designed to grab your attention and to appeal to you emotionally[...]that's something that helps people connect with the brand[...]you feel a little bit more connected to the people that the brand represents."	Connecting more with a brand when emotional ads capture attention and foster a sense of human connection		
But for me the product should suit the things I want.[...]Not necessarily emotions, more like what the product benefits me. So what I get from it and more that I	Product functionality influences brand perception more than emotions.	Product Value Over Emotional	

want to feel a certain way with the makeup I wear."			
"If a product does what it's supposed to do, then I'm more likely to buy it. Maybe in the beginning, I might be influenced by emotional branding and think, "Oh yeah, that's how I want to feel," and then I try it[...]But overall, I wouldn't say it's only emotional branding that influences me. It's a mix, really."	Product performance leads to sustained loyalty, emotional appeal may start the process	Product Value Over Emotional Appeal	
"I wouldn't say so, because for me, it's not always about emotional loyalty[...]It's more about whether I actually like the product. If I do, then I'm likely to buy it again[...] So I'm not really emotionally attached to any particular brand."	Loyalty is based on product satisfaction, not emotional attachment.		
"Usually, I look at the price. As a student, I don't have much money, so I don't use high-end products."	Price outweighs emotional branding in repeat buying decisions		
"I would not say that it increases my trust in the brand all the time... maybe the branding will make me try their products in the 1st place... but they have to be good for me to buy it... it does not really influence my trust – it has to be a good product itself... it might influence the way I am more open to try it out."	Trust and loyalty depend on quality, not just emotional branding		
"So, it's not the main reason I want a product, but if I know the company also does things that are important to me, it's also good to know and might influence my decisions."	Ethical alignment influences repeated buying		Brand Loyalty
"I feel like they don't only care about selling the product but also about me."	Feeling cared for increases trust and		
"One story I heard from one of my friends, they had a dog, and they bought dog food from a brand [...]at one point they said to the brand our dog died, then the brand told them the last pack they bought they don't have to pay for and they got their money	Authentic emotional appeal drives deep brand loyalty		

back and they send them a small flower for it[...]those people will never go to another brand and keep buying that products from them if they ever get another dog."		Brand Authenticity & Shared Values Build Loyalty	
"We have Dove products, but I never thought about the brand[...] now I see that they actually also trying to push for other things which is nice to see."	Discovering brand values post-ad reinforces loyalty.		
"I mean, let's say for a hypothetical girlfriend I would think more likely of buying this one[...] because you are more aware of what the brand stands for"	Brand values influence loyalty-based purchasing for others		
"When you attach to someone's emotions then it really creates a beautiful bond between the customer and the products."	Emotional branding builds a long-term emotional bond between a brand and customers		
"I do want the brand that I buy products from to align with my values[...]I just don't support brands that do animal testing[...]even if they are hyped or have good branding[...] if it's not aligning with my values at all I will not buy them."	Value misalignment overrides branding and stops loyalty		
"Yes I think so I do use their products myself and I know that they have a really wide range[...]so I would say that they are inclusive and also authentic"	Perceived inclusivity and authenticity lead to brand loyalty		
"I think that especially when the advertisements[...]show emotions and cater to diversity is something that is quite high in my books. Instead of other brands."	Emotional diversity ads enhance long-term preference and loyalty		
"It gave me the impression that they're genuinely trying to reflect what daily life looks like for everyone, while staying true to their values."	Authenticity and relatability support customer-brand loyalty		
"Even after watching the ad, I felt a sense of connection with the brand, because it seemed like they truly understand the perspective that many women	Shared experience and emotional recognition enhance loyalty		

share... it addressed something many of us experience"			
"I appreciated how the brand's values were portrayed so authentically, while still showcasing the actual products. It showed that Rare Beauty truly caters to all kinds of women."	Authentic portrayal of values builds trust and loyalty		
"I definitely think it seems authentic... they do cater to the target audience... they have a wide range of shades... not just... for lighter skin tones, but also shades that cater to all skin types..."	Tailored authenticity supports continued engagement		
"I feel like for makeup, it's a little more personal[...]That's the same with clothes[...]you can express yourself. So I would say it probably works better in those industries as in others, because it directly affects the person."	Believing emotional branding is more effective in personal and self-expressive product categories like makeup and fashion		
"I think it does. However, for some products[...] especially in cosmetics[...]it does benefit more because it directly affects the way you look."			
"I think it is quite important because there's a lot of products in the market[...]a lot of them are on a good level of quality or price. So then what makes it stand out is how they connect to the person."	Believing emotional connection becomes a key differentiator when product quality and price are similar		
"I think with, for example, the steel industry, they want more reliance and compliance and for cosmetic industry, it's such a saturated market that I think it would be a stronger tool to differentiate your brand from others."	Viewing emotional branding as a more effective differentiator in saturated consumer markets than in utilitarian industries	Greater Impact in Personal & Saturated Markets	Industry-Specific Observation
"Emotional branding and cosmetics probably work well especially because the target group are mostly women. I think it really helps to grow on the emotional base in these campaigns compared to other industries that have less in common with your own body or	Perceiving emotional branding as particularly effective in cosmetics due to its connection with appearance and personal identity		

skin and how you look in general."			
"I think with the cosmetic and beauty industry in general there are more choices of words that can help to touch the consumer. It is more personal. In other industries it probably works as well but maybe a bit different, and it can be harder to achieve the connection."	Seeing emotional branding as easier to implement effectively in personal industries like cosmetics due to language and emotional closeness		
"I think cosmetics, beauty, and clothing are the industries where emotional branding plays the biggest role. These products are very personal, they help people express their identity."	Viewing emotional branding as most powerful in industries linked to self-expression and identity		

Appendix 6: Declaration

I, Meysa Shakibapour Tabrizi, hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently, using only the sources and tools referenced. All passages taken directly or indirectly from published or unpublished sources have been clearly marked and properly cited.

I further confirm that I used tools such as Connected Papers to support my literature search and the identification of relevant academic works. In addition, I used tools to enhance grammar, language flow, and clarity, while ensuring that the thesis's content and structure represent my own intellectual work and contribution.

This thesis has not been submitted to any other examination board.

Enschede, 17.06.2025

M. Shakibapour