

Introduction to Special Issue on the Science of Hedonistic Consumption

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Hedonic consumption is one of the most compelling, rewarding, and, at times, tortuous aspects of the human experience. Stories of sin and salvation make up some of history's and literature's greatest tales, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens. With the fourth issue in the inaugural volume of the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (the preceding issues' topics being the Behavioral Science of Eating, Consumer Ownership and Sharing, and Consumer Response to Regulation), we thought it befitting to focus on what might be the number one association with consumption—material or purchased experiences that give people pleasure and other rewards.

The concept of hedonistic consumption also involves emotions associated with consuming for pleasure. Related positive emotions include joy, ecstasy, bliss, and relief, and, among negative emotions, we included guilt, regret, disappointment, and anger.

The call for papers emphasized studies conducted in the field or using nontraditional samples (i.e., beyond college students), and studies of actual behavior, which all too often are neglected in behavioral science. Recognizing that seeking pleasure in consumption can lead to unforeseeable and undesirable consequences, we welcomed papers on problematic aspects of seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding hedonistic consumption. We also solicited comments from industry experts. We received many more manuscripts than we had pages in the issue and went through a stringent peer-review process, which means that some high-quality manuscripts were not able to be included.

The articles that made it through the review process span a range of topics, from preference for luxury to holiday rituals to food color. This issue showcases a variety of research methodologies, such as field experiments conducted in champagne houses (Szocs, Biswas, and Borges) and at a music festival where attendees could buy a cup

of coffee (Müller, Mazar, and Fries). Articles in this issue analyzed archival data from the US Census, World Health Organization, World Bank, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Xu and Albarracín), online shopper reviews (Keinan, Kivetz, and Netzer), and momentary experience ratings (Mead et al.). The people studied came from all walks of life: university students and employees, online panels, expectant mothers, shoppers, imbibers, and festival-goers.

Positive feelings are central to hedonistic consumption, as are goals. While many people seek to feel good and achieve important goals, these motives do not always support each other. Mead et al. sought to understand how small positive or negative daily life events affect goal progress. Using a method that allowed them to track people's experiences throughout the day, they found that small positive moments were able to offset the impact of small annoyances, which enabled goal pursuit.

Moving to positive events of a much larger scale is an article that addresses the basic question of what one should spend money on when wanting to highlight a special moment in life. Goodman, Malkoc, and Stephenson studied how best to signify weddings, graduations, decade birthdays, and other milestones. These may well seem like the ideal events for which to splurge on a coveted experience (e.g., vacation, spa day, party), yet that is not what confers the greatest happiness. Material objects can better retain the ability to conjure up memories of the special event and remind people of the joy they felt when it occurred. Given that cherishing special events with a purchase often means spending a good chunk of money, that's news you can use!

Cherished events are very often steeped in interpersonal relationships, and several articles focus on the interpersonal aspects of hedonistic consumption. Sezer et al. show that engaging in a holiday ritual with family heightens plea-

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sure in the holiday. Performing holiday rituals with families makes people feel more engaged in the holiday and more connected to loved ones.

While Sezer et al. have focused on the benefits of interpersonal aspects, Gillespie, Mulder, and Leib uncover a surprising drawback. They studied simulated laughter in television comedy shows and found that while laugh tracks aid in conveying the sense that the show is funny, they reduce viewers' overall enjoyment because fake laughter prevents viewers from fully immersing themselves in the show.

Buying a pricey material object often brings with it not only the new product but also a dollop of guilt. Marketers—and, let's face it, consumers—long have been interested in finding ways to alleviate that source of guilt. Keinan et al. find that simply adding a small practical benefit to an otherwise indulgent hedonic product can ameliorate the guilt and allow the purchase to bring unbridled pleasure to its owner.

Mollifying guilt was the focus of an article on cause-related marketing, in which marketers seek to offer a pro-social benefit to another audience (not the end user directly) upon purchase. Müller et al. find that cause-related marketing is a tricky maneuver because consumers don't like to be reminded of the problems that the purchase might

be causing, leading them to prefer products that can offset problems irrelevant to the harms done by the product.

Attempts to feel better were the impetus of an article on alcohol consumption. Since much imbibing is done for emotion control purposes (to ameliorate negative or enhance positive feelings), Szocs et al. studied happiness and perceived intoxication. Their work reveals that drinking champagne out of a lighter-weight glass, as opposed to a standard glass, heightened feelings of being happy and drunk, thus contributing to the burgeoning study of product-related sensations in marketing.

Product-related sensations were investigated in an article on the lightness or darkness of tasty, unhealthy foods. Madzharov, Ramanathan, and Block's studies reveal that people like and eat more unhealthy foods that are light colored, and feel more positively when consuming them. Along with Szocs et al.'s article, this work offers an easy way to liven up some of the most common means by which people engage in hedonistic consumption—eating and drinking.

We hope you enjoy reading the special issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Wishing you more and better hedonistic consumption!