

## ARTICLE

# Beyond experiential spending: Consumers report higher well-being from purchases that satisfy intrinsic goals

Olaya Moldes 

Department of Marketing &amp; Strategy, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

**Correspondence**

Olaya Moldes, Department of Marketing & Strategy, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Aberconway Building, Column Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, UK.  
Email: moldeso@cardiff.ac.uk

**Abstract**

Consumption is thought to be a goal-directed behaviour often marketed as a source of happiness. However, it has yet to be tested whether we associate greater happiness with purchases that help us move towards our goals—goal satisfaction mechanism—or whether spending behaviours that help us primarily to attain intrinsic goals—such as affiliation or self-growth—are linked to higher well-being as self-determination theory would predict. Across two studies, intrinsic goal satisfaction was associated with greater well-being, rather than the purchase helping the consumer to satisfy their goals. Moreover, intrinsic goal satisfaction predicted significantly more variance in well-being (13%–16%) than the material-experiential purchase typology (2%–5%) used in past research. Finally, higher dispositional extrinsic goals predicted both extrinsic and intrinsic goal satisfaction through consumption suggesting that materialistic individuals might use consumption as a strategy to seek the attainment of intrinsic goals. These findings suggest that future research should shift the focus from the purchase (*what* is bought) to the consumer (*who* is spending money and *why*) when looking at the links between spending money and happiness. Finally, this report hints that future interventions aiming to reduce excessive consumption should explore lessening people's extrinsic goals.

**KEYWORDS**

experiential spending, intrinsic and extrinsic goals, materialism, self-determination theory, spending money and happiness, well-being

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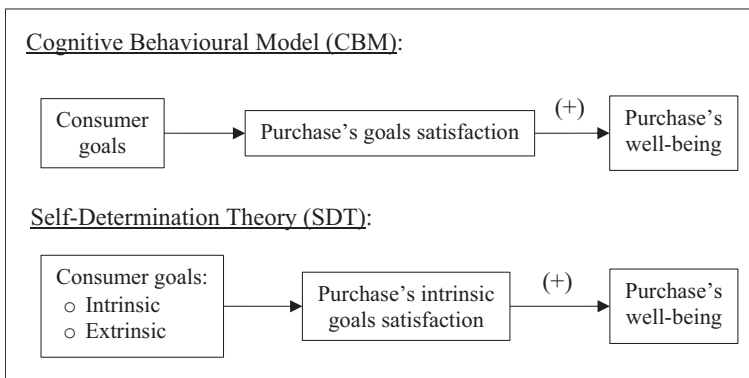
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## BACKGROUND

Spending money to improve one's mood and escape negative emotions is a common practice in developed societies (Atalay & Meloy, 2011; Donnelly et al., 2016; Richins, 2011). Indeed, the search for happiness through spending behaviours is often reflected in marketing slogans such as 'Open happiness' by Coca-Cola or Volkswagen's 'Get in, get happy'. However, how people attribute happiness to their purchases is still not fully understood (Alba & Williams, 2013; Richins, 2020).

Consumption has been conceptualized as a goal-oriented behaviour (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2008; Kopetz et al., 2012) in which individuals spend money to autonomously achieve or move closer to the achievement of their goals (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Vohs & Baumeister, 2011). Cognitive-behavioural psychologists (Bandura, 1977; Locke & Latham, 1990) suggest that seeking goals that individuals find important and moving closer to their attainment, regardless of their nature, would bring well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1986; Klug & Maier, 2015). Supporting this claim, recent research suggests that individuals are happier when they engage in activities that are aligned with their goals (Wang & Milyavskaya, 2020). Self-determination theory (SDT), however, postulates that pursuing intrinsic goals, such as self-growth, affiliation or community feeling, leads to higher well-being than pursuing extrinsic goals, such as financial success, attractive appearance or social popularity, because intrinsic goals better satisfy the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). However, it has yet to be tested whether we associate greater happiness with purchases that help us move towards our goals—goal satisfaction mechanism—or whether spending behaviours that help us primarily to attain intrinsic goals are linked to higher well-being—SDT (see Figure 1). Therefore, building on the conceptualisations of consumption as a goal-directed behaviour (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Huffman et al., 2000; Kopetz et al., 2012; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001), the present research will test the theoretical frameworks of the cognitive-behavioural model (CBM) against SDT in the applied setting of consumption to better understand how consumers associate happiness with their spending choices. Moreover, the present research also aims to examine how the motivational framework reviewed in this report relates to the material-experiential purchase typology that has been extensively used by prior literature when looking at the links between consumption and happiness.

This research will deepen our understanding of consumer decision-making by shedding some light on the mechanisms of attributing well-being to spending behaviours. Moreover, given that people often engage in consumption seeking hedonic gratification (Alba & Williams, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2016), this research could help us to identify factors that could be enhanced or diminished in future interventions aiming at reducing excessive or dysfunctional consumption patterns.



**FIGURE 1** Theoretical frameworks from psychology that link individual goals and well-being applied to a consumer setting.

## Cognitive-behavioural model versus self-determination theory

Goals have been defined as representations of end points that people try to reach or avoid (Norem, 2019, p. 351), acting as cognitive structures that motivate individual behaviour (Van Osselaer & Janiszewski, 2012). In addition, goal progress and goal attainment have been systematically linked to higher well-being (Diener, 1984; Klug & Maier, 2015). Consumption is one available strategy to progress and attain personal goals (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Vohs & Baumeister, 2011), and prior literature suggests a direct link between consumers' goals and their spending behaviours (e.g. goal-directed behaviour model, Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001). However, no prior work has looked at the links between goal attainment and well-being in the applied setting of consumption.

Two theoretical frameworks could serve to explain the links between consumer goals and the well-being gains associated with their spending choices. On the one hand, the goal satisfaction mechanism, based on a cognitive-behavioural approach (Bandura, 1977; Locke & Latham, 1990), suggests that activities that help attain a goal that one considers important will provide well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1986; Klug & Maier, 2015). This framework does not differentiate between the types of goals pursued, as it is the perception of moving closer towards one's goals that would generate the positive assessments. Therefore, this approach would predict that consumers will associate higher well-being with purchases that are perceived as helping them moving towards their goals.

On the other hand, some theories on motivation highlight the need to understand the reasons behind engaging in a task by distinguishing between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* engagement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). SDT conceptualizes motivation as *intrinsic*, when individuals perform an activity for internal or autonomous reasons, and *extrinsic*, when the behaviour is performed to attain a separable outcome or reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71). Therefore, goals that people pursue can be *intrinsic*, understood as goals that satisfy basic and inherent psychological needs, such as affiliation, community feeling and self-growth, or *extrinsic*, which are those goals that are dependent on contingent external approvals and rewards, such as financial success, social recognition or having an appealing image (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). SDT suggests that intrinsic goals better satisfy the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness than extrinsic goals (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Indeed, the needs for competence (Dweck, 2017; Fromm, 1955; White, 1959), autonomy (Bandura, 1977; Vignoles, 2011) and relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dweck, 2017; Fromm, 1955; Maslow, 1943; Vignoles, 2011) have been repeatedly identified in the psychology literature as fundamental human needs linked to well-being. SDT also distinguishes between different types of motivation, autonomous and controlled (Sheldon et al., 2004). Past research suggests that autonomous (vs. controlled) motivation affects the satisfaction received from a consumer product when the consumption goal is hedonic (Botti & McGill, 2011). However, what an individual pursues (intrinsic or extrinsic goals) and why they pursue it (autonomous and controlled motivation) have been found to produce distinct effects on well-being (Sheldon et al., 2004). Research in SDT has found that pursuing and attaining intrinsic goals is beneficial for one's well-being; however, pursuing extrinsic goals is linked to negative outcomes such as anxiety and negative affect (Niemiec et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the effects of seeking intrinsic and extrinsic goals on the well-being that consumers associate with their purchases have not been systematically examined. In this context, SDT would predict that purchases meant to help individuals achieve intrinsic goals would receive higher happiness assessments than those contributing to the attainment of extrinsic goals.

Given both approaches, the present research will test whether consumers will associate higher well-being with purchases that contribute to the satisfaction of a goal that is important to them, regardless of the type of goal sought (CBM), or whether consumers will associate higher well-being with purchases that contribute to the satisfaction of intrinsic goals, but not extrinsic ones (SDT):

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Is it the goal satisfaction mechanism or the satisfaction of intrinsic goals which predicts the well-being that consumers associate with their purchases?

## A motivational framework versus the material-experiential purchase typology

A stream of research suggests that spending money on purchases that are ‘lived through’ and perceived as more experiential, such as holidays or music concerts, are often rated as a higher source of happiness than material products, such as clothing or collectables (for a systematic review of this research area see Weingarten & Goodman, 2020). Experiential purchases have been linked to social connection and relatedness (Bastos & Brucks, 2017; Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Goodman & Lim, 2018; Howell & Hill, 2009) suggesting that experiential spending might contribute to the satisfaction of the intrinsic goal of social affiliation. Moreover, material consumption has been shown to be preferred when consumers aim to maximize economic gains (Mann & Gilovich, 2016), and material purchases have been assumed to be more extrinsically motivated than experiential purchases when an external observer was asked to form an impression of someone based on their spending choices (Van Boven et al., 2010). However, no prior work in the material-experiential literature has used a motivational-based approach for explaining the well-being that consumers associate with the different types of purchases. Moreover, it is also worth noting that happiness is a malleable construct often influenced by different individual-based factors such as culture (Tsai et al., 2006) or age (Mogilner et al., 2010). Therefore, some scholars have proposed that approaches based on individual differences such as personality-based measures (Matz et al., 2016) or identity-construction frameworks (Moldes et al., 2019) might be better predictors of the well-being that consumers associate with their spending choices than those focused on purchase-based characteristics. Therefore, the present work will also examine how an individual-differences approach using a goal satisfaction framework compares with the widely used material-experiential purchase-based distinction for explaining the well-being that consumers associate with their spending choices:

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Will the framework looking at the satisfaction of goals that a purchase provides be a better predictor of the well-being associated with that spending choice than its material-experiential nature?

## Materialism and well-being in consumption

The construct of materialism has been often understood as an individual excessive focus on pursuing the extrinsic goals of acquiring wealth and displaying social and economic power to others (Dittmar et al., 2014). Prior research looking at the effects of materialism on the well-being gains that consumers attribute to their purchases have provided mixed results. Some studies found that more materialistic individuals report greater happiness from their purchases than those lower in these goals (Millar & Thomas, 2009; Richins, 2013) while other studies did not find that materialism influenced consumers' attributions of well-being (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Zhang et al., 2014). However, no prior research has looked at whether the effect of attributing higher well-being to material purchases might be driven by the satisfaction of the consumer's extrinsic goals. Therefore, the present research will also explore whether the effect of materialism on the well-being that is associated with a spending choice might be dependent on the goals that the purchase helps to satisfy.

## The present research

Two studies were designed to examine the effects of satisfying the consumer's goals (CBM) as opposed to the satisfaction of intrinsic goals (SDT) in the association of well-being with a purchase (RQ1). Moreover, the present work also explores how a purchase-based characteristic, the material-experiential nature, compares to the intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction framework for explaining the well-being that consumers associate with a spending choice (RQ2). The studies included in this paper were approved by the corresponding ethics committee from the university in which they were conducted.

## STUDY 1

The objective of Study 1 was to answer RQ1 with an experimental design by testing the fit between the participants' individual differences in the endorsement of intrinsic and extrinsic goals and the intrinsic–extrinsic goal satisfaction condition assigned. Moreover, Study 1 also aimed to examine RQ2 by comparing the material-experiential nature of the participants' spending choices with the participant's goal satisfaction framework.

### Method and procedure

Three hundred participants were recruited through an online subject pool (Prolific) and completed a survey hosted in Qualtrics. Participants needed to live in the UK and be more than 18 years old to participate in the study. Respondents first completed a psychological measure on goal orientations, then were randomly allocated to one of the two conditions (intrinsic or extrinsic goal satisfaction) before they were asked to describe a past purchase made within the last three months for a value between £50 and £1000 (excluding groceries, stationery items, bills, regular commute expenses or paying off debts) that fitted the instructions of the condition assigned. They were also asked to provide a subjective judgement on the well-being gains that they associated with the purchase; the cost and the date that the purchase was made; and whether the purchase described was material or experiential. Finally, they completed some demographic questions.

### Manipulation

#### *Intrinsic condition*

Participants in the intrinsic condition ( $n = 150$ ) were asked to describe a purchase made with the intention of primarily fulfilling one or more of the goals of: (1) improving personal relationships; (2) growing and learning new things; (3) helping others; or (4) improving their understanding of who they are.

#### *Extrinsic condition*

Participants in the extrinsic condition ( $n = 150$ ) were asked to describe a purchase that was primarily made to achieve one or more of the goals of: (1) keeping up with fashion trends in hair and clothing; (2) displaying a financially successful image; (3) improving one's popularity; or (4) increasing one's wealth.

### Measures

#### *Goal orientations*

The Aspiration Index (AI; Kasser & Ryan, 1993) was used to assess the importance that participants assigned to different life goals. This measure is composed of 18 items that assess the degree to which individuals value extrinsic goals (financial success, attractive appearance and social popularity: 'It is important to me that I will be financially successful.') and intrinsic goals (self-acceptance, affiliation and community feeling: 'It is important to me that I will have good friends that I can count on.') on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (very important). The statements from the extrinsic and intrinsic goals were averaged separately (intrinsic  $a = .78$  and extrinsic  $a = .86$ ) to be able to compare goal satisfaction against the satisfaction of intrinsic goals in a consumption setting, following procedures from prior research on goal orientations (Janke & Dickhäuser, 2019; Niemiec et al., 2009).

#### *Purchase's well-being*

After participants were asked to describe a purchase aligned with the manipulation, they were requested to estimate with a 2-item measure the well-being associated with the described purchase ('When you think

about your purchase, how happy does it make you?’ and ‘How much does this purchase contribute to your overall life satisfaction?’) on a 9-point scale (ranging from 1 = not at all to 9 = very much;  $\alpha = .74$ ). This measure was taken from prior literature (Moldes et al., 2019; Pchelin & Howell, 2014) and aimed to combine affective and cognitive well-being judgements to achieve an overall understanding of the subjective hedonic gratification that consumers associate with a spending choice.

#### *Purchase's goals satisfaction*

Participants indicated to what extent their described purchase satisfied extrinsic and intrinsic goals by answering an adapted version of the AI to fit a purchase situation (e.g. ‘This purchase helped me... to gain social status; to improve my personal relationships’: extrinsic goal satisfaction  $\alpha = .84$ ; and intrinsic goal satisfaction  $\alpha = .84$ ) using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

#### *Material-experiential purchase typology*

Participants were presented with a definition of material (something one purchases to have) and experiential purchase (something one purchases to do) and were asked to rate whether their purchase was material or experiential from 1 (definitely a material possession) to 7 (definitely an experience) in a continuum as in previous research on material and experiential consumption (Carter & Gilovich, 2010).

#### *Demographics*

Participants answered some questions on their gender, age, occupation and their subjective economic status.

## Sample

The sample of 300 participants was made up of 70% women ( $n = 210$ ), with ages ranging from 18 to 76 ( $M = 34.16$ ,  $SD = 12.26$ ). Of the sample, 74.3% were British ( $n = 223$ ), 51% reported to be full-time employees ( $n = 153$ ), 21.3% were students ( $n = 64$ ), 18.7% selected other ( $n = 56$ ), and 15% were part-time employed ( $n = 45$ ).

## Results and discussion

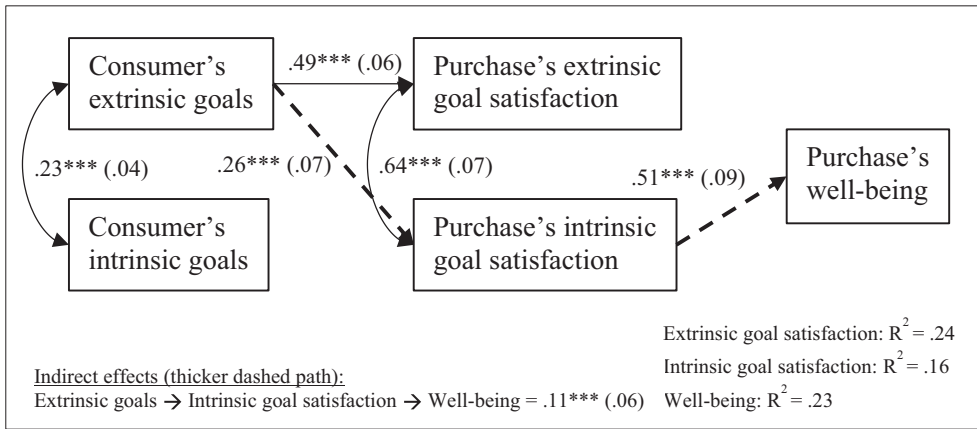
### Manipulation check

Participants in the intrinsic goal satisfaction condition rated their purchase as more intrinsic ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) than those in the extrinsic goal satisfaction condition ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SE = .09$ ),  $t(298) = 5.98$ ,  $p < .001$ , bootstrapped 95% CI [0.53, 1.04],  $r = .32$ . However, there were no differences in extrinsic goal satisfaction across the two conditions ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SE = 1.11$  and  $M = 3.50$ ,  $SE = 1.10$  for the intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction condition, respectively),  $t(298) = -1.14$ ,  $p = .256$ , bootstrapped 95% CI [-0.40, 0.01]. These results confirm that the manipulation of intrinsic goal satisfaction was successful, but not the manipulation of extrinsic goal satisfaction. Therefore, when examining the satisfaction of goals by the described purchase in the subsequent analyses the condition assigned will be used as a control variable while the continuous variables looking at the perceived intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction will be used as main predictors.

### RQ1: Goal satisfaction versus intrinsic goal satisfaction

To examine RQ1 a path analysis (saturated model) was performed using the well-being estimations as the dependent variable, the participant's intrinsic and extrinsic goal predispositions as predictors and the





\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**FIGURE 2** Saturated path analysis model used in study 1 ( $N = 300$ ) to examine whether it is the goal satisfaction mechanism or the satisfaction of intrinsic goals that predicts the well-being consumers associate with their purchases (RQ1). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Note: Only significant paths are displayed. Effects reported are standardized with standard errors in parentheses.

perceived satisfaction that the described purchase provided of intrinsic and extrinsic goals as mediators (see Figure 2 and Table S2 in Supporting Information).<sup>1</sup> The model was developed with the open-source statistical software R and the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012), using the estimation method of maximum likelihood, and 2000 bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals were requested. Moreover, direct and indirect effects from the participants' intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction to their well-being estimations were also requested, and the variable indicating the condition assigned was added as control.

The results from the analysis showed that only the perceived satisfaction of intrinsic goals by the purchase was a significant predictor of the well-being associated with the purchase ( $R^2 = .23$ ). Moreover, the satisfaction of extrinsic goals was predicted by the consumer's dispositional extrinsic goals ( $R^2 = .21$ ). However, the purchase's satisfaction of intrinsic goals was not predicted by the consumer's intrinsic goals, but by their extrinsic goal orientations ( $R^2 = .16$ ). In fact, there was a significant positive indirect effect going from the consumer's dispositional extrinsic goals to the purchase's well-being estimations via the satisfaction of intrinsic goals.

In answering RQ1, the results suggest that only the satisfaction of intrinsic goals that the purchase provides predicts the well-being associated with the purchase, supporting SDT in the applied setting of consumption. No support was found for the CBM as there were no significant indirect effects matching the participants' goal predispositions and the purchase's satisfaction of those goals (i.e. intrinsic goals  $\rightarrow$  intrinsic goal satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  well-being; and extrinsic goals  $\rightarrow$  extrinsic goal satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  well-being). However, the significant indirect effect found suggests that higher extrinsically oriented individuals might provide higher well-being estimations on their purchases because these help them with the satisfaction of intrinsic goals.

## RQ2: Testing the motivational framework versus the material-experiential purchase typology

To examine whether the proposed goal satisfaction framework is better at explaining well-being associated with a purchase than the material-experiential purchase-based typology a hierarchical linear regression was performed with 2000 bootstrapped confidence intervals (see Table 1). All the predictor variables

<sup>1</sup>Means, standard deviations and correlations among all variables in Studies 1 and 2 can be found in Tables S1 and S3 in Supporting Information.

**TABLE 1** Results from the hierarchical regression performed in study 1 ( $N = 300$ ) to test how the goal satisfaction approach compares with the experiential-material rating for explaining well-being associated with a spending choice (RQ2)

Predictor (x)	B	SE	$\beta$	t	LCI	UCI
Step 1: $R^2 = .047$ , $F(1, 298) = 14.571$ , $p < .001$						
Intercept	6.918**	.085		81.257	6.752	7.082
Condition	0.325**	.085	.216	3.817	0.160	0.495
Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .021$ , $F(2, 297) = 10.852$ , $p = .009$						
Intercept	6.557**	.162		40.502	6.199	6.886
Condition	0.252*	.089	.168	2.841	0.080	0.436
Material-experiential rating	0.113*	.043	.154	2.617	0.028	0.205
Step 3: $\Delta R^2 = .156$ , $F(4, 295) = 21.306$ , $p < .001$						
Intercept	6.780**	.152		44.505	6.437	7.087
Condition	0.045	.088	.030	0.506	-0.126	0.222
Material-experiential rating	0.043	.041	.059	1.057	-0.042	0.129
Purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction	0.619**	.094	.491	6.610	0.417	0.801
Purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction	-0.139	.094	-.102	-1.478	-0.337	0.074
Step 4: $\Delta R^2 = .015$ , $F(6, 293) = 15.378$ , $p = .054$						
Intercept	6.814**	.153		44.642	6.499	7.114
Condition	0.040	.088	.026	0.454	-0.128	0.217
Material-experiential rating	0.051	.042	.070	1.207	-0.033	0.133
Purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction	0.882**	.159	.700	5.550	0.558	1.218
Purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction	-0.155	.167	-.113	-0.927	-0.525	0.249
Purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction $\times$ material-experiential rating	-0.087*	.044	-.259	-1.987	-0.177	0.000
Purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction $\times$ material-experiential rating	0.011	.044	.033	0.255	-0.071	0.093

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ .

were centred for the analyses. In the first step of the regression, the dichotomous variable indicating the condition assigned (coded as 1 intrinsic and -1 extrinsic) was introduced to control for the manipulation. The results showed that the condition that the participants were assigned was a significant predictor of the well-being associated with the purchase  $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.16, 0.50],  $R^2 = .05$ , showing that participants assigned to the intrinsic condition rated their purchase higher in well-being than participants assigned to the extrinsic condition. This model predicted 5% of the variance of well-being. In the second step of the regression, the material-experiential rating variable was introduced as a predictor of the well-being associated with the purchase. The results revealed that the material-experiential rating was a significant predictor of the purchase well-being,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .005$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.20],  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ , confirming the experiential effect shown by prior literature (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Weingarten & Goodman, 2020). This model increased the predicted variance on well-being scores by 2% and was significantly better than the previous model. In the third step of the regression, the variables measuring the participant's perceived satisfaction of intrinsic and extrinsic goals by the purchase were introduced showing that only intrinsic goal satisfaction was a significant predictor,  $\beta = .49$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.42, 0.80],  $\Delta R^2 = .16$ . This model increased by 16% the prediction of well-being scores over the previous model. Moreover, once the variables of goal satisfaction were introduced, both the condition ( $p = .613$ ), and the experiential-material rating ( $p = .292$ ) were no longer significant predictors of well-being. Finally, in the last step of the regression, the interactions between the experiential-material rating variable and the variables looking at the intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction from the purchase were introduced. The results revealed that the interaction between intrinsic goal satisfaction and the experiential-material rating variable was significant,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .048$ , 95% CI [-0.18, 0.00],  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ . However, it is worth noting



that the 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals crossed zero, and thus the significance of the interaction should be interpreted with caution.

In answering RQ2, the results suggest that the perceived satisfaction of intrinsic goals by the purchase predicted significantly more variance (from 2% to 16%) on the well-being associated with that purchase than the experiential-material purchase typology used by prior literature. Nevertheless, to further understand whether the material-experiential rating variable might be conflating with the goal satisfaction dimension, there is a need to collect further empirical evidence given the results observed for the interaction between the material-experiential rating and the intrinsic goal satisfaction variable.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 had a correlational design aimed at replicating the results from Study 1 by examining RQ1 and RQ2 with a more naturalistic methodology that would allow participants to freely describe a past spending choice.

### Method

Four hundred and fifty-two participants were recruited through Prolific following the procedures from Study 1. First, participants completed the AI scale measuring intrinsic and extrinsic dispositional goal orientations (extrinsic  $a = .85$ ; intrinsic  $a = .79$ ). Then, participants were asked to freely describe a purchase made within the past three months for a value between £50 and £1000 (excluding groceries, stationery items, bills, regular commute expenses or paying off debts) and to indicate the cost and the date that the purchase was made. Participants were also asked to estimate how much their purchase had increased their well-being ( $a = .74$ ), to rate how much it fulfilled extrinsic and intrinsic goals (extrinsic goal satisfaction  $a = .87$  and intrinsic goal satisfaction  $a = .84$ ), and to rate their purchase in the material-experiential continuum as in Study 1. Finally, they were asked the same demographic questions as in the previous study.

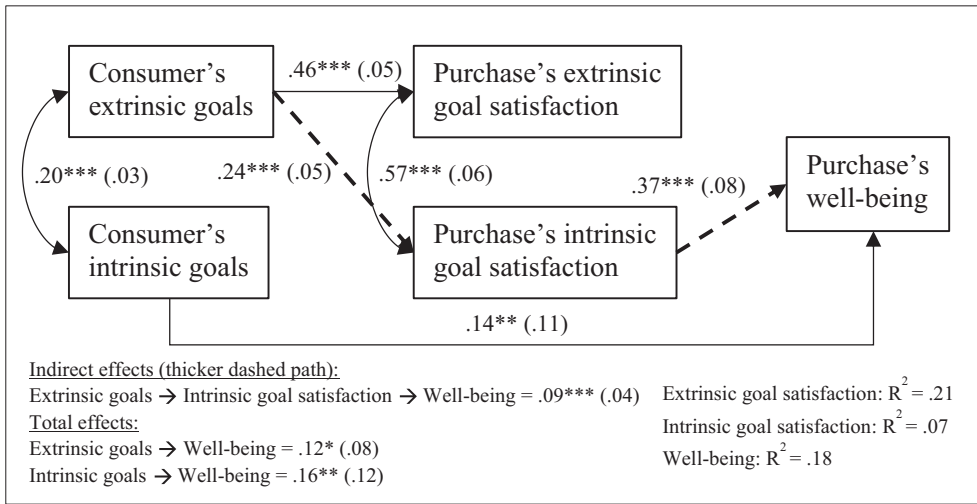
### Sample

The final sample consisted of 452 participants. Among respondents, 55.2% were women ( $n = 226$ ), with a sample age range from 18 to 71 ( $M = 33.67$ ,  $SD = 10.78$ ). Of the sample, 87.4% were British ( $n = 395$ ), 62.4% reported to be in full-time employment ( $n = 282$ ), 15.5% ( $n = 70$ ) were part-time employed, 13.1% were students ( $n = 59$ ), and 12.6% ( $n = 57$ ) marked other.

## Results and discussion

### RQ1: Goal satisfaction versus intrinsic goal satisfaction

A saturated path analysis following the same procedures used in Study 1 was used in Study 2 for examining RQ1 (see Figure 3 and Table S4 in Supporting Information). The results from the analysis indicated that the well-being associated with a purchase ( $R^2 = .18$ ) was predicted by the participants' intrinsic goal predispositions and the purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction. Moreover, the participants' extrinsic goal predispositions predicted both the purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction ( $R^2 = .21$ ) and the purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction ( $R^2 = .07$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant positive indirect effect from the consumer extrinsic goals predisposition to well-being via the satisfaction of intrinsic goals and two significant positive total effects from the participants' intrinsic and extrinsic goals to the well-being estimations.



\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**FIGURE 3** Saturated path analysis model used in study 2 ( $N = 452$ ) to examine whether it is the goal satisfaction mechanism or the satisfaction of intrinsic goals that predicts the well-being consumers associate with their purchases (RQ1). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Note: Only significant paths are displayed. Effects reported are standardized with standard errors in parentheses.

In answering RQ1, these results replicate the findings from Study 1 as the satisfaction of intrinsic goals was a significant predictor of the well-being associated with the purchase, and no significant indirect effects matching the participants' goal predispositions and the purchase's satisfaction of those goals were found. Therefore, the current results support SDT framework over the CBM in consumption. Moreover, also replicating the results from Study 1, higher extrinsically oriented individuals were found to be more prone to pursue the satisfaction of intrinsic goals through consumption, which was associated with higher well-being scores.

## RQ2: Testing the motivational framework versus the material-experiential purchase typology

To assess whether the goal satisfaction framework was better at explaining well-being associated with a purchase than the material-experiential approach a hierarchical linear regression was performed with 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals (see Table 2). All predictor variables were centred for the analyses. In the first step, the variable measuring the material-experiential rating of the purchase given by the participant was introduced as a predictor of the well-being associated with the purchase. The results showed that this variable was a significant predictor of well-being,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.12, 0.27],  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ , suggesting that purchases rated as more experiential received higher well-being scores. This model predicted 5% of the variance in well-being scores. In the second step of the analysis, the variables of intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction were introduced. The results revealed that only the satisfaction of intrinsic goals was a significant predictor of well-being,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.25, 0.65],  $\Delta R^2 = .13$ . This model predicted 18% of the total variance, accounting for 13% more variance than the previous model. In the final step of the regression, the interactions between the material-experiential rating variable and the intrinsic and extrinsic goal satisfaction were introduced in the model. The results showed that none of the interactions were significant at predicting the well-being associated with the purchase ( $p > .05$ ).

**TABLE 2** Results from the hierarchical regression performed in study 2 ( $N = 452$ ) to test how the goal satisfaction approach compares with the experiential-material rating for explaining well-being associated with a spending choice (RQ2)

Predictor ( $x$ )	$B$	$SE$	$\beta$	$t$	LCI	UCI
Step 1: $R^2 = .051$ , $F(1, 450) = 25.099$ , $p < .001$						
Intercept	6.598**	.077		85.775	6.442	6.753
Material-experiential rating	0.192**	.039	.230	5.010	0.117	0.267
Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .125$ , $F(3, 448) = 32.244$ , $p < .001$						
Intercept	6.598**	.072		91.841	6.450	6.737
Material-experiential rating	0.107*	.040	.128	2.684	0.023	0.193
Purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction	0.459**	.090	.308	5.117	0.265	0.654
Purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction	0.126	.082	.087	1.537	-0.065	0.310
Step 3: $\Delta R^2 = .001$ , $F(5, 446) = 19.377$ , $p = .786$						
Intercept	6.618	.080		83.052	6.458	6.770
Material-experiential rating	0.114*	.042	.137	2.707	0.024	0.203
Purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction	0.459**	.090	.308	5.096	0.269	0.653
Purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction	0.126	.082	.087	1.533	-0.064	0.307
Purchase's intrinsic goal satisfaction $\times$ material-experiential rating	-0.026	.043	-.034	-0.615	-0.106	0.054
Purchase's extrinsic goal satisfaction $\times$ material-experiential rating	0.004	.040	.006	0.108	-0.079	0.092

Note: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

In answering RQ2, the results replicate the findings from Study 1 and suggest that the motivational framework is more meaningful than the experiential-material approach as it predicted significantly more variance on well-being associated with consumer products (13% and 5%, respectively). Moreover, the results from Study 2 also suggest some overlapping of variance explained between the two approaches as once the motivational variables were introduced in the model, the weight of the material-experiential rating variable was significantly reduced. However, these results also hint that both approaches might explain some unique variance as the two predictors remained significant in the final model.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present work tested whether consumers associate higher well-being with spending behaviours that help them in attaining their goals—goal satisfaction mechanism (CBM)—or whether the attribution happens only when purchases enable them to primarily satisfy intrinsic goals—SDT. The results from two studies show that consumers attributed higher well-being to purchases that help them in the attainment of intrinsic goals. Therefore, the attribution of well-being to a spending behaviour is influenced by the types of goal that the purchase satisfies, in this case intrinsic goals, and not by the goal satisfaction mechanism, supporting the framework of SDT over CBM in the applied setting of consumption. There are two possible complementary explanations for the effect found. One is through the accumulation of personal experiences of well-being enhancements when pursuing intrinsic goals through spending behaviours. These past experiences would lead consumers to link higher well-being to purchases that satisfy or help in the satisfaction of intrinsic goals. Another explanation comes from the *shared beliefs* value-creation mechanism, which occurs when an object or activity acquires value through the internalization of social discourses about *what* is desirable and *how* it should be acquired (Higgins, 2011). Some authors have mentioned that there are prescriptive social discourses on how to obtain happiness that could influence well-being judgements (Ahmed, 2010). Therefore, the shared beliefs about *what* goals are more socially acceptable to pursue and *how* they should be pursued, in this case intrinsic goal seeking, could be affecting consumer's happiness judgements of their purchases.

Furthermore, the present work connects to prior literature looking at the links between experiential consumption and happiness (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Weingarten & Goodman, 2020) by comparing the purchase-based distinction with a consumer goal satisfaction approach. The results showed that how much a spending choice helps in the satisfaction of intrinsic goals is a better predictor of the well-being that consumers associate with a purchase than its material-experiential nature. Therefore, these results have significant theoretical implications for the literature on spending and happiness as they show that approaches that take into consideration the particular characteristics of the consumer, in this case their motivation, might better explain the consumer's perceived experienced well-being in consumption than purchase-based approaches. As a result, future research looking at consumption and well-being should shift the focus from the purchase (what is bought) to the consumer (who is spending money and why) and integrate motivational-based approaches when looking at the attribution of well-being gains to spending choices.

In addition, the present report showed that the consumer's dispositional goals did not uniformly match the goals that they seek in consumption. The results revealed that only the consumer's extrinsic goals were linked to the satisfaction of extrinsic goals through spending behaviours suggesting that perhaps people might choose alternative means to spending behaviours when seeking the attainment of intrinsic goals. Nevertheless, the results also showed that higher extrinsically oriented individuals sought intrinsic goal satisfaction through spending behaviours. This finding expands the current conceptualisations of materialism (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Richins & Dawson, 1992) by suggesting that the endorsement of extrinsic goals might make individuals more prone to use money and consumption, over other means, as a strategy to seek the attainment of intrinsic goals. Moreover, it suggests that the link between materialism and the well-being attributed to a spending choice might be dependent on the extent to which the purchase is perceived to help in the satisfaction of intrinsic goals.

This report has practical implications for businesses development teams as its findings suggest that they should focus on creating products or services that facilitate self-growth, affiliation with others and/or feeling helpful within their social groups, because consumers will associate higher hedonic value to purchases that help them with the attainment of intrinsic goals. Finally, the findings from this report also suggest that future interventions aiming to reduce excessive consumption should explore lessening people's endorsements of extrinsic goals. This is because a higher internalization of extrinsic goals seems to drive individuals towards seeking intrinsic goal satisfaction through spending money, when perhaps using other strategies that might not involve consumption will be in fact more rewarding and sustainable.

## Limitations and further research

Notwithstanding these advances, future work could address several limitations. First, it is worth noting that, in alignment with past research looking at the links between consumption and happiness, the present research has used hedonic value judgements of consumer products to measure well-being gains that consumers perceive to experience from spending money. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that those subjective estimations of positive affective changes provided by a purchase might not reflect objective improvements in the consumer's well-being. In fact, it has been previously noted that happiness assessments linked to consumer products can be an implicit reflection of the person's internalized beliefs about the attainment of well-being through spending behaviours (Moldes et al., 2019). Therefore, these assessments are likely to be influenced by shared beliefs and social discourses around consumption and happiness from the cultural and social environment of the consumer being assessed. Moreover, the present research measured purchases' well-being through the combination of affective and cognitive subjective judgements on perceived gains in well-being. However, it is worth mentioning that well-being is a multifaceted construct (Kitayama & Markus, 2000). Therefore, future research could explore alternative ways to capture the impact that spending choices might have on one's well-being by combining the collection of individual well-being measures (e.g. life satisfaction, anxiety or self-esteem) and other indicators of health, interpersonal well-being or meaning in life collected before, during and after the consumption process through the use of diaries or smartphone applications (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010;

Miron-Shatz et al., 2009). Along the same lines, future research could also further unravel the distinct effects that goal attainment through the purchase of consumer products might have on the different affective, cognitive and eudemonic components of well-being over time. In addition, further research looking at goal satisfaction and happiness in consumption is needed across different cultural groups within diverse socio-economic contexts as this could help to untangle the cultural and context-based effects of goal pursuit in the attribution of happiness to purchases.

Second, it must be acknowledged that different types of goals may not be uniformly attainable through consumption. For instance, certain goals may be more easily achieved through spending money on consumer products (e.g. acquiring an attractive appearance by spending money on fashionable clothing or beauty treatments), while other goals, such as personal growth, affiliation or belonging, might require an additional active engagement, or the use of supplementary resources, to be attained. For example, money might provide the necessary time or space to pursue intrinsic goals, such as a holiday with friends and family or the fees to enrol on a learning programme, but the purchase might not fulfil the goals of affiliation or self-development on its own. Indeed, research has found that the amount of effort invested in pursuing a goal increases the value of the goal (Zhang et al., 2011). Therefore, further research could look at the role of other complementary resources (e.g. time or personal effort) in the relationship between the type of goal pursued and the well-being associated with a spending choice. Finally, future research could also focus on comparing goal satisfaction strategies as it is possible that there are other ways to pursue intrinsic goals beyond consumption that might be more ecologically sustainable and could produce a comparable or superior effect on the consumer's sense of well-being.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author of this article declares no conflict of interest.

## OPEN RESEARCH BADGES



This article has earned Open Data and Open Materials badges. Data and materials are available at <https://osf.io/w9xed/>.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data, SPSS and R syntaxes, and the materials used for this research are available in its Open Science Website: <https://osf.io/w9xed/>

## ORCID

Olaya Moldes  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5790-6634>

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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