



# The Consumer Motivation Scale: Development of a multi-dimensional and context-sensitive measure of consumption goals



Isak Barbopoulos\*, Lars-Olof Johansson

University of Gothenburg, Department of Psychology, PO Box 500, SE 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

The present research describes the development of the multi-dimensional and context-sensitive Consumer Motivation Scale (CMS). Based on an integrative perspective on consumer motivation, studies in economics, marketing, and psychology are reviewed. Three overarching “master goals” are identified – gain, hedonic, and normative – which make up the foundation for the proposed scale. Across three studies, and a variety of consumption contexts, a multi-dimensional goal structure is explored, confirmed, and validated – consisting of the three gain sub-goals Value for Money, Quality and Safety; the two hedonic sub-goals Stimulation and Comfort; as well as the two normative sub-goals Ethics and Social Acceptance. The resulting 34-item measure is integrative, multi-dimensional, applicable to a wide range of settings, and takes individual and situational variability into account, and should prove useful in standard marketing research, and for development of tailored marketing strategies and segmentation of consumer groups, settings, or products.

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## 1. Introduction

Understanding and predicting consumer behavior continues to be at the forefront of consumer research (MSI, 2014). The key to a better understanding of consumption may be found in the underlying motives that drive it. Like most behaviors, consumption is purposeful and goal-driven (Bagozzi, 1993), performed as a means towards some end (Moskowitz & Grant, 2009). A goal is a cognitive representation of a desired end state. When a goal is activated, tension arises based on the discrepancy between the current and the desired state (Carver & Scheier, 1981). To reduce this discrepancy, cognitive resources – attention, information processing and knowledge structures – become available and accessible, helping us identify feasible means (Janiszewski, 2008), determine their value (Kruglanski et al., 2002), and energize our actions (Gollwitzer & Bargh, 1996). This process constructs and reconstructs the perceived value of alternatives based on whether they are conducive or detrimental to our goals (Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2007), independently of pre-existing preferences (Custer & Aarts, 2005).

Goals are thought to be organized in hierarchical goal systems, in which higher-order goals are vertically linked to sub-goals, which are in turn connected to lower-order means and behaviors (Kruglanski et al., 2002). The past decades, it has become increasingly clear that we

not only strive to maximize utility, but also to achieve hedonic (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), as well as normative goals (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). More recently, the authors of the present research found that higher-order utilitarian, hedonic, and normative goals are themselves multi-dimensional, each represented by multiple distinct sub-goals (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016). Yet, consumer models rarely integrate multiple goals into a single framework, as most scales are uni- or bi-dimensional (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007), or focus on specific determinants (e.g. Batra, Homer, & Kahle, 2001), while normative determinants are often ignored altogether (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007).

Goals, like all cognitive constructs, are susceptible to environmental cues, thereby connecting evaluations and preferences to the situation at hand (Moskowitz & Grant, 2009). Situations are often perceived in light of the opportunities and obstacles they present in the pursuit of our goals (Morse, Neel, Todd, & Funder, 2015). For instance, situations may be construed as relating to interpersonal or status goals (Bond, 2013), or pleasure, adversity, conflict, or social demand (Ten Berge & De Raad, 2002). Consequently, goal activation may vary from one situation to another, with effects on how consumers evaluate the means under consideration (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2017a), as consumers often learn to associate situations with the means and actions that can achieve the salient goals (Gutman, 1982). Knowing which goals are active in a situation, and how activation varies across situations, therefore provides valuable knowledge about what information consumers may attend to, what products they prefer, and what pricing strategies may be most effective. To date, the situational variability of goals is often

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [isak.barbopoulos@psy.gu.se](mailto:isak.barbopoulos@psy.gu.se) (I. Barbopoulos), [lars-olof.johansson@psy.gu.se](mailto:lars-olof.johansson@psy.gu.se) (L.-O. Johansson).

overlooked in models of consumer behavior, as scales generally consist of situation-independent constructs, such as consumer values (Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986), or personality traits (Aluja, Kuhlman, & Zuckerman, 2010). Furthermore, scales are often designed for specific settings or products, such as sports or tobacco (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991), or travel (Bello & Etzel, 1985), making it hard to assess changes across situations.

Based on these insights, we set out to develop a method of measuring consumption goals that is:

1. *Integrative* – encompassing not only utilitarian, but also hedonic and normative goals;
2. *Multi-dimensional* – taking potential sub-goals of the higher-order goals into account;
3. *Context-sensitive* – measuring not only individual, but also situational variance;
4. *General* – relevant for a wide variety of consumption settings and products.

The present research follows Churchill's (1979) paradigm for developing marketing constructs. First, the domain of the construct – the three master goals and their potential sub-goals – was specified and described. Second, a pool of items was generated based on theories and scales related to the potential sub-goals. Third, data was collected; the dimensions were explored and purified on sample 1A, and then confirmed on sample 1B. And fourth, additional data was collected with the purpose of thoroughly testing the convergent, discriminant, and construct validity (sample 2), as well as criterion-related validity (sample 3). For a detailed step-by-step review of the scale development process, please see the supplementary file, or Barbopoulos and Johansson (2017b).

## 2. Domain of the construct: the three master goals and their potential sub-goals

In the goal-framework developed by Lindenberg and Steg (2007), three higher-order “master goals” have been identified and described in detail. These are the *gain goal* (“to guard or improve one’s resources”; Lindenberg & Steg, 2007, p. 119), the *hedonic goal* (“to feel better right now”; Lindenberg & Steg, 2007, p. 119) and the *normative goal* (“to act appropriately”; Lindenberg & Steg, 2007, p. 119). Although shown to be highly influential in a variety of consumption contexts (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007), these goals are typically studied within separate fields of research; gain in rational choice theories (e.g. Schoemaker, 1982), hedonic in theories on emotions and mood (e.g. Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and normative in research on moral norms (e.g. Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000; Schwartz, 1977; Stern, 2000).

In recent research by the authors of the present article, the dimensionality of the master goals was examined (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016). It was found that a distinction should not only be made between the higher-order master goals, but also between the sub-goals that link the master goals to means and behaviors. The gain goal can be represented by at least two distinct sub-goals, one dealing with frugality and the other with financial security, with unique relationships with consumer behaviors. Likewise, the normative goal can be represented by one sub-goal dealing with ideals and moral obligations, and another dealing with social status and fitting in. In the present article, we expand upon this research, as we set out to develop a coherent and integrative measure of multiple consumption goals, applicable to a variety of settings and products. To this end, the scale development follows a top-down approach, in which the highly influential master goals are used as a point of departure. Based on an in-depth review of the literature related to the three master goals, a preliminary structure consisting of nine potential sub-goals was identified. The structure of sub-goals was then explored, confirmed, and validated across three studies, the results of which is formalized as the Consumer Motivation Scale (CMS).

### 2.1. Gain

The gain goal is associated with a sensitivity to changes in personal resources (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). When the gain goal is active, consumers are sensitive to variations in cost and perceived value, while emotional, social, and ethical considerations are of lesser importance. The gain goal has been studied extensively within rational choice and expectancy-value theories (e.g. Schoemaker, 1982), where means are assumed to be evaluated and ranked according to their perceived value, based on what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988).

According to Lindenberg and Steg (2007), the gain goal may be comprised of sub-goals dealing with saving money, increasing returns or value, and dealing with threats to one’s financial security. In the literature review, the authors of the present research found support for the notion that a distinction should be made between the sub-goal to save money and the sub-goal to increase value through returns (e.g. quality; see Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Research has shown that as the price of an item goes up, consumers tend to perceive the item to be of higher quality (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). However, for price conscious consumers, the heightened cost may lower the perceived net value of the product. Thus, the assigned value depends on what one values more; a low price, or high quality. Furthermore, it may be argued that the quality of a product is in turn different from its functional value. Whereas the function of a product relates to what it does, quality relates to how well it does it (Sheth et al., 1991).

To account for the distinction between these types of value, we propose three preliminary dimensions to represent the gain goal: *Value for Money, Quality, and Function*. Furthermore, in previous research by the authors of the present research, support was found for an additional sub-goal dealing with safety, likely related to the financial security aspect of the gain goal (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016). Thus, we propose a fourth dimension of the gain goal: *Safety*.

### 2.2. Hedonic

When a hedonic goal is active, consumers are motivated to improve the way they feel, and will be especially sensitive to changes in pleasure and mood (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). The relatively unstable and short-sighted nature of this goal means that utility and norms play a lesser role, thus reducing the effectiveness of many strategies of behavior change such as pricing strategies, incentives, and information campaigns.

In goal-framing theory, the hedonic goal is assumed to be associated with sub-goals that deal with pleasure, excitement, and avoiding effort (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). In the marketing literature, hedonism is often treated as a uni-dimensional construct, ranging for example from pleasant to unpleasant (Batra & Ahtola, 1990). However, as shown by Bello and Etzel (1985), the motivation to choose an exciting or stimulating alternative is different from choosing a relaxing or comfortable alternative, although both are related to well-being (Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, & Verbrugge, 1999). Since the level of stimulation varies as a function of time, activities, or stimulation in the environment, consumers may prefer stimulation-seeking or stimulation-reducing behaviors at different points in time (Helm & Landschulze, 2009).

To account for the distinction between pleasure, excitement, and avoiding effort, we propose three dimensions, one that represents valence (i.e. pleasure-displeasure; Batra & Ahtola, 1990), and two that represent arousal (high/low respectively; Russel, 1983; Watson & Tellegen, 1985): *Pleasure, Stimulation, and Comfort*.

### 2.3. Normative

Consumption has been linked to several environmental issues facing modern society (IPCC, 2013). The last decades have seen a growing interest in ethical consumption among consumers and researchers alike

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