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## **Consumer hopefulness: construct, relevance to internet marketing, antecedents and consequences**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the concept of consumer hopefulness as an important driver of consumption. Hopefulness is defined as a positive feeling evoked in response to an outcome appraised as goal congruent and possible. This positively valenced emotion arises in everyday consumption as consumers evaluate their current state and try to determine ways in which consumption can make for a better, happier future self. The paper differentiates the construct of hopefulness from related constructs such as self-efficacy, expectations, and optimism. It also focuses on the consumption domains in which hopefulness arises. Most relevant to advertising and the internet, the paper identifies factors that affect hopefulness, as well as tactics that influence these factors (and hence the level of hopefulness that consumers experience). The marketing relevant outcomes of consumer hopefulness are also articulated, and directions for future research are specified.

**Keywords:** hopefulness; emotions; effect; consumption; decision making; marketing communications; advertising; internet marketing.

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## 1 Introduction

"In the factory we make cosmetics. In the store we sell hope"  
(Charles Revson, founder of Revlon).

Emerging research points to the critical role of emotions stimulated by traditional and non-traditional media as determinants of consumer choice [1–4]. The present research builds on this literature by focusing on a specific emotion guiding consumption decisions – hopefulness and its relevance to advertising and the internet.

Consumers feel hopeful about achieving a number of goal congruent outcomes, such as winning the lottery, staying healthy, losing weight, managing relationships, investing wisely, and engaging in socially beneficial consumption practices. The internet (as well as other traditional marketing communications channels) can also stimulate how hopeful consumers feel about achieving such outcomes. As evidenced by the Revson quote above, the cosmetics industry is predicated on stimulating hopefulness about product purchase and usage and a more beautiful and desirable self. Despite this intuitive link, relatively little research has examined consumer hopefulness and the advertising and internet marketing communication factors that foster it.

The objective of this paper is to examine the concept of consumer hopefulness and discuss its relevance to advertising and internet marketing. We begin by defining *hopefulness* and differentiating it from related constructs. Next, we examine *consumer hopefulness*, describing how hopefulness about product acquisition and usage relates to hopefulness about achieving broader goal-congruent outcomes. We also demonstrate the myriad life domains in which consumer hopefulness is evoked. Section 4 articulates the *antecedents* of hopefulness and the *marketing tactics* that induce hopefulness. The fifth section articulates several consumer and marketing-relevant *consequences* of hopefulness. The final section summarises these ideas and presents avenues for future research.

## 2 Defining hopefulness

We define hopefulness as a positively valenced feeling that arises in response to a future-oriented outcome appraised as goal congruent and possible. This definition is consistent with appraisal theory, a widely regarded perspective on emotions which posits that emotions are responses to one's interpretation (or appraisals) of the environment and its relevance to our goals [5–12]. Goals are defined as "symbolic representations of

possible states of the environment that an individual will try to achieve" [13]. Emotions are related to, but distinct from, goals, as they reflect outcomes of an appraisal process involving goals and the extent to which the environment supports or does not support goal achievement.

### 2.1 *Appraisal dimensions*

Appraisal theorists have identified a number of dimensions individuals use to assess their environment. Most fit the overarching set of dimensions articulated by Johnson and Stewart [14] and include goal congruency, agency, uncertainty, normative/moral compatibility, and importance. Two of these appraisal dimensions are relevant to the appraisal of hopefulness: goal congruency and uncertainty.

*Goal congruency.* Firstly, hopefulness is felt in relation to outcomes appraised as favourable or goal congruent [15–17]. *Goal congruency* reflects the extent to which the environment is *consistent with one's goals*. In a benign environment, 'goal congruent' means that a *favourable outcome could occur*, whilst in an aversive or threatening environment, 'goal congruent' means that a *negative outcome could be avoided or resolved*. Thus, most consumers are hopeful that they *will* have enough money for retirement and are hopeful that they *won't* wrinkle prematurely as both outcomes are perceived as goal congruent. Other outcomes are goal irrelevant, as their occurrence has no implications for goals. A non-sports fan is not likely to feel hopeful that a particular team wins because her status as a non-fan makes the outcome irrelevant to her. Still other outcomes are goal incongruent. In a benign environment, 'goal incongruent' means that a positive outcome will not occur, whilst in an aversive environment, 'goal incongruent' means that a negative outcome will occur. For example, one would not be hopeful that one would *fail* to win the lottery, or that one *would* lapse into an eating binge, as these outcomes are likely perceived as goal incongruent.

*Uncertainty/possibility.* Secondly, hopefulness is future-oriented as it focuses on actions and outcomes that have yet to be realised [18,19]. When we say that we are hopeful that we will quit smoking, find a life partner, or have a nice car we are suggesting that quitting, partnering, or acquiring a nice car has not yet occurred. The future-oriented focus of these outcomes makes hopefulness an emotion evoked in response to an outcome appraised as uncertain.

Whilst uncertain, goals eliciting hopefulness must be viewed as *possible* (vs. impossible or totally certain) [15]. The fact that the outcome is viewed as possible and goal congruent creates a positive feeling in consumers that good outcomes could be forthcoming. Consumers feel *hopeless* when a goal congruent future outcome is viewed as *impossible (and hence certain not to occur)*. They feel *hopeful* when a goal congruent future outcome is viewed as *possible (yet uncertain)*. The *degree* of hopefulness consumers feel varies as a function of how feasible the goal congruent outcome is perceived to be. Thus the more a goal congruent yet uncertain outcome is perceived to be feasible, the more hopeful consumers will feel.

The term hopefulness is often used interchangeably with a related term, 'hope'. To *have hope* is to suggest that one is hopeful – that is to say that one sees a goal congruent outcome as possible. Considerable controversy has existed over whether hope or hopefulness is or is not an emotion. On the one hand, Solomon [16] notes that Thomas Aquinas viewed hope as a virtue and more akin to reason than emotion. Hopefulness *does not* appear on standard emotion typologies of arousal, dominance, and valence. Nor does

it appear in Plutchik's General Psychoevolutionary theory of emotions [17] or Watson and Tellegen's circumplex model of emotion [18]. On the other hand, scholars during the medieval era did regard it as a fundamental emotion [15]. Philosopher Ernst Bloch suggests it is an emotion that can be learned [19].

Some suggest that hopefulness does not appear on standard emotion scales because the emotion theories from which these scales are derived have a strong biological and physiological focus, emphasising basic emotions like fear, anger, and love as opposed to intellectual emotions like hopefulness [15,20,21]. Hopefulness may be a higher order emotion as its evocation may require assessments of possibilities and future orientation that may not be possible in non-humans, and hence not evident in an evolutionary theory of emotions.

Only recently, with the development of appraisal theory as a theoretical approach to emotions, has hopefulness emerged as a bona fide emotion [6–8,11,12]. According to appraisal theory, *emotions are caused by appraisals or perceptions of a given situation*.

## 2.2 Relationship of hopefulness to other constructs

*Hopefulness and self-efficacy.* Hopefulness bears some similarity to the 'self-efficacy' construct which Bandura defines as "a belief in one's capacities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" [22, p.3]. Hopefulness and self-efficacy may be related as greater or lesser degrees of self-efficacy may be associated with more or less hopefulness. For example, the more efficacious consumers perceive themselves to be in completing a given action (e.g., dieting), the more hopeful they may feel about achieving the goal congruent outcome (loss of weight). Analogously, Bandura notes that lack of efficacy beliefs may engender hopelessness or despair [22]. Thus, self-efficacy in certain circumstances increases the perceived possibility of a goal congruent outcome, which in turn influences consumer hopefulness.

However, several factors differentiate self-efficacy from hopefulness. Firstly, self-efficacy reflects a *belief* whilst hopefulness reflects an emotion. Secondly, hopefulness is felt only in response to situations regarded as goal congruent. *Goal congruence is not necessary* for self-efficacy since one can feel efficacious at performing actions that are either goal congruent (e.g., doing well on a test) or goal irrelevant (e.g., skipping for 30 yards). Thirdly, self-efficacy focuses on personal accomplishments. Hopefulness may encompass outcomes relevant to personal accomplishments, but it is also relevant to outcomes that have nothing to do with personal accomplishments or achievements enabled by the self. For example, one may feel hopeful that terrorism will not strike or that one's father will recover from illness but not believe that one can initiate actions to prevent or stimulate these outcomes. Relatedly, self-efficacy is linked with *behaviour* or actions; conditions not necessary for the experience of hopefulness. In short, whilst self-efficacy is a belief that 'I can do something', hopefulness is a feeling that a good outcome, though uncertain, is possible.

*Hopefulness and expectations.* Hopefulness can also be distinguished from the concept of expectations (or perceived probabilities) regarding an outcome. Firstly, hopefulness is an emotion, whilst expectations are *beliefs*. Secondly, hopefulness reflects situations described as positively valenced and goal congruent whilst expectations and perceived probabilities encompass situations that are *goal congruent, goal incongruent, or goal irrelevant*. For example, one can have strong expectations that it will rain tomorrow, but since one has outdoor plans for the day, one does not feel strong

hopefulness for that outcome. Finally, feelings of hopefulness are predicated on perceptions of possibility, not *probability*. One can experience feelings of hopefulness even under conditions where the probability of an outcome is low. Numerous examples from medicine, for instance, indicate that consumers experience hopefulness about overcoming disease even in the face of overwhelming odds, and that individuals, given the exact same probabilities of survival, vary greatly in the hopefulness that they feel. The difference is that some individuals interpret even extremely low odds of survival as evidence of possibility [23]. Several authors have observed that probability and possibility are distinct concepts and that possibility distributions are unique and differentiated from probability distributions [24,25].

*Hopefulness and optimism.* Tiger defines optimism as “a mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future – one which the evaluator regards as socially desirable to his [or her] advantage or for his [or her] pleasure” [26, p.18]. According to this definition, optimism shares the goal congruent dimension of hopefulness. Unlike hopefulness, which varies by situation, optimism is often characterised as an individual difference variable [27–30]. Thus, some scholars distinguish the terms on the basis of situational vs. dispositional character. Though others believe that individuals can be situationally optimistic or pessimistic, they believe that optimism/pessimism and hopefulness can co-exist and are not the same construct [21,15]. Lazarus, for example, argues that one can be pessimistic about the occurrence of a goal congruent outcome, but still feel hopeful that it will. The reason is that whilst optimism and pessimism are wrapped up in *expectations about what is likely* (i.e., *probability*), hopefulness encompasses *feelings about what is possible* [15,21,31].

### 2.3 *Hopefulness and motivations*

Rossiter and Percy have identified two broad categories of motivations labelled ‘informational’ and ‘transformational’ motives [32]. The former involve negative motivations, and the movement to a less negative state. For example, one informational motive, ‘problem removal’ is motivated by the consumers’ desire to get rid of a current problem. The emotions that characterise ‘problem removal’ are annoyance (caused by the problem) and relief (following its removal). Transformational motives involve positive motivations and the movement to a state of emotional pleasure. For example, ‘sensory gratification’ involves movement from the state of feeling dull to feeling joy. ‘Social approval’ involves movement from feeling apathetic to feeling proud. Importantly, *hopefulness is an emotion that accompanies each of these motivations* as consumers appraise the possibility that the product or its usage has the capacity to move one from a negative (or neutral) emotional state to a positive one.

## 3 **Relating hopefulness to consumer behaviour and marketing**

### 3.1 *Consumption domains in which consumers feel hopeful*

The remainder of the paper focuses on the relevance of hopefulness to consumer behaviour and internet marketing. We begin by focusing on what consumers feel hopeful for, and hence the domains in which they should feel varying degrees of *consumer hopefulness*. In essence, a focus on the consumption domains relevant to the construct of

consumer hopefulness is examined by focusing on the *goal congruence* dimension that underlies hopefulness. Specifically, consumers experience feelings of hopefulness for outcomes that reflect possible goal congruent consumption goals.

*Abstractness of goal congruent outcomes: hopefulness about selves, outcomes, and products.* Table 1 shows that consumers can consider different entities for which they experience hopefulness and that these entities vary in their level of abstractness [33]. At the broadest level are goal congruent outcomes *about the self*; goals about *who one would like to be*. Indeed, at this broad level consumers are inspired by a vision of a future self or optimised future representations of the self – also called a ‘hoped for self’ [34]. Hopefulness about the extent to which that vision can be achieved provides the direction and impetus to achieve personal growth and change [35]. For this reason, hoped-for selves have been described as “self-directed and goal-oriented embodiments of self” [36].

Table 1 shows that a less abstract and more situationally bounded conceptualisation of goals relates to the current problems or specific tasks on which consumers are working [37]. Hence consumers are said to feel varying degrees of hopefulness that specific *outcomes can be achieved*. Consumers may feel more or less hopeful about losing weight, looking more attractive, feeling more centred, being closer to one’s child, or finding a cure for AIDS. Current concerns are central to the concept of a ‘goal congruent outcome’, as hopefulness about many outcomes can be readily described at the level of a current concern. Feeling hopeful about having a nice vacation, having a more attractive house, and overcoming diabetes are all wrapped up in current concerns. At an even more micro level, consumers can be hopeful that they will *acquire products* (see Table 1). Children are hopeful, for example, that Santa will bring the toys they want for Christmas whilst overweight adults are hopeful that a new diet product will help them lose weight.

The arrows connecting these levels of abstraction in Table 1 is meant to suggest that hopefulness about achieving goals related to self, outcomes, and products are *mutually reinforcing and interdependent*. For example, as consumers feel increasingly hopeful that they can acquire a given product (e.g., a new car), they may, in turn, feel more hopeful that the product will bring about desired outcomes (e.g., approving looks from attractive women), and more hopeful about achieving a desired self-concept (being ‘cool’ and ‘admired’). Consumption is thus critical to the realisation of goal congruent future selves and it is consumers’ hopefulness that product acquisition and usage resolves current concerns and achieves goal congruent outcomes that links products, current concerns, and hoped for selves.

*Domains of hopefulness.* The first column of Table 1 also reveals that there are a number of life domains in which consumers have hoped for selves [38], and hence domains in which they experience hopefulness (i.e., spiritual, societal, achievement, etc.) [15]. Certain products are relevant to the achievement of various ‘hoped for selves’ within each domain. The last column of Table 1 shows the specific industries and products relevant to each domain. We describe several of these domains below (though not all given space constraints). The larger take-away from Table 1 and the discussion below is that consumers feel hopeful regarding consumption outcomes relevant to a broad array of consumption activities and product categories.

**Table 1** Entities and domains of hopefulness

<i>Entities about which consumers experience hopefulness</i>		<i>Hopefulness on the internet</i>				
<i>Domains of hopefulness</i>	<i>About objects (product acquisition)</i>	<i>About outcomes (current concerns)</i>	<i>About Selves (Hope themes and values)</i>	<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Number of sites</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Spiritual domain	Find and have products that symbolise a closer connection or our elevation to a higher realm	Find salvation Find balance and meaning in life Connect with higher levels of existence Miraculous cures	Be saved Be one with the universe Find transcendental meaning to life	Spirituality Religion New Age	8,070,000 64,600,000 127,000,000	www.spirituality.com/ www.religion-online.org/ www.newage.com/
	Find products that are non-toxic to the environment	They find a cure for AIDS The economy doesn't fall into a recession	Be a concerned citizen To help the environment	Social awareness Charity	9,850,000 20,600,000	www.socialfunds.com www.charitynet.org/
	Find services that are consistent with saving the planet			Social policy	33,000,000	www.clasp.org/
Achievement domain	Have a degree / title	Win a race	Be a winner	Career counselling	3,190,000	www.careercc.com/
	Have beautiful/stylish clothes Have a fancy car	Win the lottery Have a lot of money Get a promotion	Be successful Be financially secure Be perfect Be admired	Contests Luxury	9,620,000 26,300,000	www.amazing-kids.org/ contests.html www.luxurylink.com/
Economic domain	Have wealth	Financial security	Be affluent	Work at home	314,000,000	www.work-at-home-dot.com/
	Have a nice home Save money	Material success A better standard of living	Be respected	Financial planning Gambling	17,800,000 19,100,000	www.financial-planning.com/ www.gambling.com/
Interpersonal domain	Find and have products (e.g., toys, gifts, greeting cards, books on relationships) and identify and use services (e.g., dating services, family therapy,) that will foster better relationships	Have my children always love me Get a date on Saturday night Have good friends/ lasting friendships Help my Dad recover from cancer	Be a better parent Be a better partner Be a better friend Be a good son/daughter	Dating Couple therapy Shyness	36,500,000 1,880,000 34,600	www.datingsitesguide.com/ www.marriagesuccess.com/ www.social-anxiety.com/
	Find and have products (e.g., books, tapes) and identify and use services (therapy) that will make one more centred, outgoing, confident, patient	Feel more centered Act in a more outgoing manner Act in a more confident manner Act more patiently toward my children	Be better adjusted	Self help Self therapy Depression	52,300,000 2,960,000 12,800,000	www.thinkrightnow.com www.helpyourselftherapy.com/ www.depression-screening.org/
Physical domain	Find and have products and identify and use services that will make one a non-smoker, slimmer, younger, more beautiful, protected	Lose my addiction to tobacco Lose weight Look attractive Look young A void being burgled	Be healthy Be sexually appealing Be safe	Beauty Fitness Dieting	46,400,000 59,500,000 2,370,000	www.beautynet.com/ www.fitnessonline.com/ www.freedieting.com/

Consider, for example, how hopefulness about *interpersonal relationships* stimulates consumer behaviour and is relevant to marketers in a number of product categories. As examples, consumers may be more hopeful about developing an enjoyable and gratifying love life by the availability and use of self-help books on relationships, provocative lingerie, sex toys, sex therapists, restaurants that promote intimate dining, and/or vacations or cruises and hideaways that promise couples much needed 'alone' time. The internet has quickly established itself as a forum or marketplace where those who are hopeful about making improvements in their interpersonal relationships can find products or services to that effect. The proliferation of online dating services, and services that help individuals get back in touch with long-lost friends attests to that – indeed, a recent survey found that Classmates.com ranked second on internet advertising impressions in 2002 [39].

Consumers may also feel hopeful about *personality* changes that will help them better adapt to everyday living. A shy consumer may be hopeful about becoming more outgoing, a consumer who is heavily in debt more frugal, and an anxious consumer calmer. Again, the marketplace may stimulate hopefulness through such means as self-help books on mastering happiness and becoming effective, psychotherapy practices, pharmaceuticals (Prozac, Effexor, Paxil), dietary supplements (St. John's wort and kava-kava) and alternative/new age practices. Again, the internet has become a popular source of hopefulness for self-improvement and personality changes. At [www.headworks.com](http://www.headworks.com), for example, consumers can buy self-help books and tapes, engage in e-therapy, and participate in mental health discussion groups.

Finally, consumers may feel varying degrees of hopefulness about the extent to which they can be beautiful, sexy, healthy, safe, and achieve other outcomes related to the *physical domain*. The availability of treatments like plastic surgery, hair removal, skin care products, specialised hair products, beauty parlours, and the like may enhance hopefulness that such physical beauty is possible. Herbs, minerals and drugs that pledge to suppress appetite, burn fat, increase stamina and sexual potency may likewise induce hopefulness in the physical domain. Fitness online, Cosmo online, Weightwatchers online are just some of the internet sites that appeal to consumers' hopefulness in the physical domain.

#### **4 Factors that influence and marketing tactics that enhance consumer hopefulness**

Given the potentially relevant implications of hopefulness to a number of consumer life domains, it is critical to understand the use of the 'hopeful' positioning strategy, the various antecedent conditions that stimulate how hopeful consumers feel and the tactics that marketers use to alter these a priori levels of consumer hopefulness by appealing to these antecedents. In this section, we discuss five factors that influence hopefulness and articulate marketing interventions that alter/moderate these effects (for a summary of these antecedents and the associated marketing tactics see Table 2).



**Table 2** Antecedents to hopefulness and marketing tactics that enhance hopefulness

<i>Antecedents to hopefulness</i>	<i>Marketing tactics to enhance hopefulness</i>	<i>Brand names and taglines consistent with this tactic</i>
<p><i>Perceived goal difficulty</i></p> <p>The more difficult the achievement of a goal congruent outcome is perceived to be, the less hopeful consumers are that they can achieve it</p>	<p>Reveal tips, strategies, tools, tactics, solutions to goal achievement</p> <p>Suggest doable sub-goals that lead to the ultimate goal achievement</p> <p>Reveal innovations and indicate differential advantages that render previously difficult goals as now achievable</p> <p>Suggest that goals can be achieved more easily or quickly than one thought</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forbes – ‘Capitalist Tool’</li> <li>• Aveeno – ‘Nature’s secret for brighter, radiant skin’</li> <li>• Mita – ‘Total document solutions’</li> <li>• Jenny Craig – ‘Lose weight for \$1 per lb’</li> <li>• Pear’s Soap – ‘Preparing to be a Beautiful Lady’</li> <li>• Feed the Children – ‘Just a few cents a day can make the world of difference’.</li> <li>• MHP diet products ‘the science of fitness’</li> <li>• Met-Rx – ‘Engineered nutrition’</li> <li>• du Maurier: ‘A new frontier in safer smoking’</li> <li>• Lancôme: ‘Skincare innovation’</li> <li>• MG – ‘Safety Fast’</li> <li>• Sonicwall – ‘Complete security with zero hassles’</li> <li>• National Mobility: ‘Another life made easier’</li> <li>• Easy as Dell</li> </ul>
<p><i>Actual or simulated experiences</i></p> <p>The less successful the consumer has been at achieving the goal in the past, the less hopeful they are that they can achieve it in the future</p>	<p>Encourage imagery/fantasy of outcome success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classmates.com – ‘Rediscover your past’</li> <li>• Elizabeth Arden – ‘Seeing is believing’</li> <li>• VW – ‘Drivers Wanted’</li> <li>• Agilent Technologies – ‘Dreams made real’</li> </ul>
<p><i>Perceived control</i></p> <p>The less control consumers perceive they have over the outcome, the less hopeful they are that the goal congruent outcome can be achieved</p>	<p>Show that the product enhances the control the consumer has in achieving the goal-congruent outcome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waterhouse – ‘You’re in control’</li> <li>• Nike – ‘Just Do It’</li> <li>• Microsoft – ‘Where do you want to go today?’</li> <li>• USDA Forest Service: ‘Only you can prevent forest fires’</li> </ul>

**Table 2** Antecedents to hopefulness and marketing tactics that enhance hopefulness (continued)

<i>Antecedents to hopefulness</i>	<i>Marketing tactics to enhance hopefulness</i>	<i>Brand names and taglines consistent with this tactic</i>
<p><i>Pathways thinking</i></p> <p>The greater the number of plausible routes to achieve the goal-congruent outcome the more hopeful consumers are that the outcome can be achieved</p>	Demonstrate the multiple routes by which the goal-congruent outcome may be achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvard Business School – ‘Turning Excellent Potential into Unlimited Possibility’</li> <li>• Fujitsu – ‘The Possibilities are Infinite’</li> <li>• Arrowhead Pond Sports venue – ‘We’ve increased your options’</li> </ul>
<p><i>Perceptions of luck</i></p> <p>The greater the perceptions that chance will favour the occurrence of a goal-congruent outcome the more hopeful consumers are that the outcome can be achieved</p>	Suggest that what is due to luck can really be controlled (create lucky talisman; encourage superstitious behaviours; imply control)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lucky Jeans – ‘Wanna get Lucky’?</li> </ul>

Important questions are raised about what affects the *degree to which consumers feel hopeful*. Since hopefulness arises from appraisals of the possibility of a goal congruent outcome, factors that influence consumer hopefulness should in some way alter consumers’ perceptions of the possibility of the goal congruent outcome. We consider several of these factors.

#### 4.1 Perceived goal difficulty

One factor affecting the perception of possibility and consequently feelings of hopefulness is the extent to which consumers perceive the goal as difficult. Goals perceived as inordinately difficult or impossible to achieve are generally associated with less achievement motivation [40], lethargy, and feelings of hopelessness [30]. Goal difficulty can itself be related to the number of activities that intervene between a goal and its achievement. As the number of such activities increases, the possibility of perceived success at goal attainment decreases. Stotland [41], proposes that the reason is that as the number of activities grows larger, the perception that all the necessary sub-outcomes will occur and will do so as planned declines. He also suggests that hopefulness can be enhanced when the individual tries to reach smaller sub-goals within the broader goal structure (e.g., losing two pounds next week) rather than the larger goal (e.g., 40 pounds) all at once since reaching smaller goals is more possible than reaching the larger one.

*Marketing tactics that reduce perceived goal difficulty.* If perceived goal difficulty reduces hopefulness, marketers should be able to enhance hopefulness by communicating that a goal perceived as difficult is actually *more easily* achieved than previously thought.

Firstly, perceptions of goal difficulty are reduced through *revealing 'secrets'*, or previously unknown *'tricks', 'tips', 'steps' and 'solutions'* to achieving them (i.e., book titles like *Secret Sexual Positions, Secrets to Making Great Pictures, and the Millionaire Next Door: Surprising Secrets of America's Wealthy*). Products may hence be positioned as the exclusive means to obtaining this privileged information (Table 2). For example, [www.secrets2success.com](http://www.secrets2success.com) promises 'secrets to making unbelievable money', whilst [www.1001beautysecrets.com](http://www.1001beautysecrets.com) offers a varied catalogue of alternative medicine, nutrition, fitness, and cosmetic 'secret' products to attain the beauty one hopes for.

The possibility of a goal congruent outcome is also heightened by marketplace mechanisms that imply that difficult goals can be achieved in a few *simple steps or at a very slight cost* (i.e., book titles like *Ten Steps to Reversing Aging, Nine Steps to Financial Freedom, and Seven Steps to a Pain Free Life*). A recent internet search yielded approximately 6,400,000 sites that offer 'simple steps' to financial success, starting your own business, succeeding in the job market, and/or to losing weight fast, to name a few.

Another tactic is to suggest that *support is provided* to the consumer to facilitate achievement of difficult goals. The internet site [Dietdiva.com](http://Dietdiva.com) makes consumers feel that weight loss is possible by promoting the availability of personal counsellors who help them achieve personal weight loss goals. Table 2 indicates that suggesting 'doable' sub-goals that lead to achievement of a broader goal can reduce goal difficulty.

Marketing communications might also *reveal innovations* and indicate differential advantages that make consumers infer that previously difficult goals are now achievable. For example, Lancôme's [www.lancome-usa.com](http://www.lancome-usa.com) website offers a monthly 'what's new' column featuring new product developments that stimulate hopefulness regarding beauty-related goals.

Perceived goal difficulty can also be lowered by communications that suggest that the goal can be achieved *more quickly* than consumers thought. For example, Fitness online purports to help consumers 'lose weight now'. [Dietdivas.com](http://Dietdivas.com) includes a testimonial from a consumer who purportedly lost 15 pounds in 10 days.

#### 4.2 Actual or simulated experiences

Another factor affecting possibility of a goal congruent outcome and hence hopefulness concerns personal experiences [41,42]. Thus, consumers will feel more hopeful about achieving a goal congruent outcome to the extent that it has happened to them or to others they know.

Whilst *actual experiences* can affect ideas about what is possible, so too can *imagined experiences*. Considerable research suggests that imagining future outcomes increases expectations regarding the likelihood of attaining them [43]. Wilkinson used relaxation and mental imagery of positive outcomes to get cancer patients to replace depression and hopelessness with hopefulness and anticipation [44]. AuBuchon found a positive relationship between positive mental imagery and hopefulness in persons with chronic lung disease [45]. One factor explaining the impact of actual or imagined experiences on possibilities is the representativeness heuristic. That heuristic suggests that individuals forecast an event based on its similarity to a particular class of events. Consumers might use the representativeness heuristic to evaluate the possibility of attaining the goal congruent outcome based on how similar a current situation is to one they have faced (or imagined) in the past.

In addition to real or imagined personal experiences, hopefulness can arise from *vicarious experiences* – that is from observations or reports of the experiences of others in achieving goals [41]. Snyder argues that individuals are more hopeful that they can achieve a goal congruent outcome if they hear stories of how others have succeeded at achieving the goal congruent outcome, cultivate friends with whom they can talk about similar goals, and find role models that they can emulate [46]. Consumers may spend considerable time using others as a basis for their own expectations. McCracken writes, “Individuals are constantly engaged in the study of the lives of others for proof that their personal ideals have been realized” [42, p.109].

*Marketing tactics that tap actual or simulated experiences.* Advertising is a powerful means by which real or simulated experiences may be evoked. Internet ads and websites may be used to call to mind things we have done in the past and create the impression that a particular outcome is once again possible. For instance, websites devoted to finding old friends/classmates and reliving old memories like [www.classmates.com](http://www.classmates.com) instruct visitors to ‘rediscover your past!’ Some advertisements remind consumers of the ‘good old days’, suggesting that what was once possible is possible again (with use of the advertiser’s product).

Other tactics may make salient the consumer’s fantasies or imagined futures. A number of online travel agents suggest possibilities of bliss on cruises and exotic travels. Other online vendors (such as Amazon.com) allow consumers to create wish lists and periodically remind them of the contents of these wish lists. The hugely profitable pornography websites (and their advertising) are also evidence of the use of fantasy in increasing consumer hopefulness.

#### 4.3 Perceived control

The possibility of a goal congruent outcome, and hence feelings of hopefulness, can also be affected by the amount of *control* we perceive we have over a future outcome. Outcomes are perceived to be under our control when we believe we can enact actions (i.e., have the perceived agency or self-efficacy) to make them happen [22,47–50].

Empirically, a relationship between perceived control and hopefulness has been observed. Carver and Scheier found that people consider personal control in forming expectations about (and hopefulness regarding) future outcomes [51]. Analogously, research by Seligman indicates that individuals experience depression and hopelessness when the situation affords no control over aversive outcomes [52]. Thus, a consumer should feel more hopeful about losing weight if he believes he can control his food intake and his opportunities to exercise.

*Marketing tactics that increase perceived control.* Marketers are adept at influencing hopefulness by affecting perceptions of control. Products, brand names, and marketing communications that suggest that a consumption outcome is under the consumer’s control should enhance hopefulness that the outcome is achievable. Consider also titles of books in the self-help industry that directly or indirectly imply that one has power and can take charge of life forces and achieve hoped-for outcomes – *Controlling the World with Your PC*, *Aging Without Growing Old: Take Charge of Your Health as Your Years Increase* are but two of numerous such examples. Nike’s *Just Do It!* tagline implies that control resides in the consumer (see others in Table 2). Apple Computer’s website ensures that consumers “can do things on a Mac that PC users only dream about, and do them more easily” ([www.apple.com/switch/](http://www.apple.com/switch/)).

#### 4.4 *Pathways thinking*

Pathways thinking, or the perceived ability to generate plausible routes to achieve a goal, also enhances hopefulness [47–49]. The more pathways the individual identifies to goal attainment, the greater the likelihood of goal achievement should any one pathway be blocked. As indicated in our section titled ‘domains of hopefulness’, consumers often see products and the marketplace as pathways for achieving goal congruent outcomes.

*Marketing tactics that increase pathways thinking.* Consider the various tactics that marketers might use to affect pathways thinking. Collagevideo.com offers any number of exercise tapes (i.e., aerobics, step aerobics, kick-boxing, TaeBo, Pilates, PowerWalking, Spinning, Tai Chi, and the Fat Burning Ball, etc.), demonstrating the number of pathways available for achieving a fit and trim physique. Hawaiiherbals.com offers nutritional advice, weight loss tips, and recipes for low fat/healthy eating. Financial planners offer a variety of services and products to suit various financial needs. The Morgan Stanley website, for example, offers a number of pathways to help consumer fulfill their ‘dreams’; a number of different financial programs, a wide selection of accounts, a variety of products to help them build a diversified portfolio, exclusive commentary to help them make an informed choice and the availability of advisors who can help them make their dream a reality. Thus, by providing a number of options through which the goal may be achieved, marketers increase hopefulness.

Another tactic to promoting novel pathways is to announce the existence of a new product or attribute. New products and attributes represent yet untried pathways to goal attainment. Some marketing communications not only claim that products are new, but ‘totally new’, involve ‘breakthrough technology’, and ‘revolutionary’ designs. Marketers claim to have ‘uncovered’ new keys to defying age, like Origin’s *White tea skin guardian*. Since outcomes are breakthrough and designs revolutionary, perceptions that the new product can make attainment of the goal congruent outcome possible seem natural. For instance, www.date.com promotes itself as “the new way to date!”

#### 4.5 *Perceptions of luck*

Rescher notes “The prospect of luck brings hope to the otherwise hopeless” [53, p.151]. Hence, whilst perceived control and pathways thinking can enhance hopefulness about achieving a goal congruent outcome, many outcomes are uncontrollable and driven by chance. Perceptions of luck may therefore play an important role in feelings of hopefulness. Luck comes into play when random external circumstances beyond one’s control determine outcomes. For example, lotteries are totally controlled by luck, and gambling and playing the stock market also carry a heavy luck component.

*Marketing tactics that increase perceptions of luck.* Marketers enhance feelings of hopefulness by suggesting that luck could befall the consumer. For example, lottery winners serve as evidence that winning the jackpot is possible. Lucky numbers, lucky dates, lucky ladies all stimulate hopefulness in the gambling industry, and internet gambling sites encourage consumers to ‘try their luck’, to ‘get lucky’, and to try to ‘beat the odds’. Such sites also play on perceptions of luck and getting lucky with such names as The Lucky Nugget Online Casino, the Lucky Emperor Casino, and the Wild Jack Casino. Sports players wear ‘lucky’ shirts or ‘lucky’ jewellery, play with a ‘lucky’ mitt, or carry a rabbit’s foot or other charms to increase the likelihood of a good game. Marketers can even affect hopefulness by suggesting that ‘luck’ can somehow be

controlled – in other words – by providing an illusion of control over a goal congruent outcome. Publications like the *National Enquirer*, *Sun*, *Globe*, *National Examiner* and *Weekly World News* often publish articles on numerology and other methods for improving one's odds in playing the lottery. A computer program produces charts designed to identify those lottery numbers which are 'due' based on previous winning history.

In sum, the above discussion illustrates that the degree to which a consumer feels hopeful depends on a variety of personal and situational factors. However, through a variety of tactics, marketers are able to influence the apriori level of hopefulness a consumer might feel in a consumption domain.

## 5 Outcomes of consumer hopefulness

The concept of hopefulness is relevant to consumer behaviour not only because its evocation may motivate consumption; several other outcomes are also relevant to marketing and consumer psychology. Importantly, these outcomes relate to the core notion of hopefulness as a positive emotion regarding a possible goal congruent outcome.

### 5.1 Motivation, goal achievement and self-regulation

As a positive emotion related to a *goal congruent outcome*, hopefulness is goal directed – consequently it motivates actions in a direction consistent with achieving the goal congruent outcome, aids in goal attainment and plays a role in self-regulation. These consumer relevant outcomes that stem from this goal directed behaviour are discussed below.

*Motivated behaviour in goal pursuit.* The first is that hopefulness affects consumers' motivation to achieve a goal congruent outcome and hence their *involvement in product categories and purchase decisions* relevant to goal achievement. Stotland writes that hopefulness is a necessary condition for motivation and action. "People who are hopeless have been described as inactive, apathetic, dull. [...] Conversely, people who are hopeful are usually described as active, vigorous, energetic" [41, p.7]. A necessarily selective review of the research in psychology provides empirical evidence for the link between hopefulness and motivation. Individuals who are hopeful pursue goals in multiple vs. single areas of their life, set more difficult goals, but also more realistic goals [54]. Hopeful individuals tend to break goals into sub goals and tend not to view goals as burdens [54]. Averill et al. suggest that hopefulness helps people remain loyal and committed to action even when logically they should, perhaps, be sceptical [15]. Not only is hopefulness involved in the *initiation of behaviours* relevant to achieving goal congruent outcomes, it is also critical to their *pursuit*. Carver and Scheier propose that when people experience adversity in achieving their goals they stop to evaluate their progress [51]. If the evaluation leads the person to believe that a successful outcome is possible (e.g., one is hopeful) the person pushes further towards goal achievement. Lack of hopefulness may result in disengagement from further effort or even disengagement from the goal itself.

*Goal attainment.* A body of research has found that hopefulness predicts goal attainment. As an example, studies by Curry et al. found that hopefulness significantly predicted student athletes' grade point average and athletic outcomes even after

controlling for cumulative GPA, overall self worth, training, natural athletic ability, and mood [49].

Several reasons may explain this link between hopefulness and goal attainment. Firstly, goal attainment should be greater when there is greater motivation behind goal pursuit. Since hopefulness is hypothesised to entail positive effect towards a goal-congruent outcome seen as possible, it should affect motivation and goal achievement. Secondly, the more hopeful one is for a given outcome, the more one might devote cognitive energy to thinking about it, imagining its achievement and imagining alternative paths to goal achievement should one path be blocked. Collectively this research suggests that the more hopeful consumers are to achieve a goal congruent outcome, the more successful they will be in achieving it.

*Self-regulation.* Goal pursuit and attainment are very relevant to the domain of self-regulation [55]. Many consumers are beset by problems of self-regulation in areas such as eating [56], shopping [57], gambling, and alcohol/drug consumption [58]. Self-regulation activities such as attempts to look better, lose weight, quit smoking, exercising, shopping, and gambling have implications for consumers' use of products (i.e., [www.nicotine-patches.com](http://www.nicotine-patches.com)) and services (i.e., [www.weightloss-index.com](http://www.weightloss-index.com)) viewed as relevant to self-regulatory activities.

Based on the above research and our conceptualisation of hopefulness, one would surmise that the hopefulness construct is critically related to self-regulation activities and outcomes. Many consumer products are likely to be viewed as instrumental to self-regulation processes and foster hopefulness in their success. The more hopeful one is about quitting smoking or losing weight, the more one is likely to consume products and services like the ones mentioned above that are marketed as aides to self-regulation. Thus, we posit that hopeful consumers will devote more effort to self-regulatory consumption activities: they will search out internet sites and products and services relevant to these problems, use these products and services, and be more successful in goal achievement. The marketing tactics to foster hopefulness discussed earlier (i.e., perceived control, new pathways, etc.) may motivate consumers to persist in the use of these products and services (or their associated 'new and improved' ones) even in the face of failure.

## 5.2 *Risk-taking behaviour*

The link between hopefulness and action tendencies, and its connection to *possibilities*, suggests that hopefulness will also motivate consumers to make choices that entail a relatively high degree of risk in order to achieve these possible goal congruent outcomes. In support of this potential link between hopefulness and risk taking behaviour, Averill et al. found that respondents were likely to agree that they took added risks or stuck their neck out for things they viewed as goal congruent and possible [15].

Although prior research has examined consumers' risk-seeking tendencies – e.g., through thrill seeking behaviours – there, risky and thrill seeking behaviours are sought for their own right. In the case of hopefulness, risk taking is not enjoyable, nor does it provide experiential benefits to the consumers. Risky behaviours are typically viewed as those that have a high risk-reward trade-off; the upsides could be much better than average, but the downsides much worse. Hopefulness, as a goal-directed affective reaction, may focus attention on the reward (what goal congruent outcomes are possible) and obscure focus on the risk it entails (i.e., what goal incongruent

outcomes are possible). However, the risky behaviour is potentially adopted because consumers' hopefulness causes them to focus on the anticipated emotions and likely positive outcomes that could accrue from the risky behaviour as opposed to the downside perils and negative anticipated emotions that might also occur.

Risk is typically viewed as multidimensional, involving economic, social, psychological, or physical domains. If hopefulness is linked with risk taking behaviour, we should observe risk taking in any or all of these domains. Though no prior studies have *explicitly* linked hopefulness and risk taking, evidence of this potential relationship is suggested by studies or anecdotal evidence provided in the goal domains described below.

Peiss' account of the beauty industry reveals that women's hopefulness for beauty has historically meant reliance on bizarre and radical means [59]. For example, during the 1800s and early 1900s, covering the face with the warm urine of a small boy was advocated as a remedy for reducing the appearance of freckles. Prescriptions for having sensual looking eyes involved taking the poison belladonna. Eating arsenic was adopted as a means of improving one's complexion. In the early 1900s, consumers tried any number of odd methods for curing acne – everything from eating three yeast cakes a day to undergoing carcinogenic x-ray treatments [60]. Similarly odd appearing practices are in vogue today – botulism for wrinkles, silicone implants for a more attractive bosom, and surgery to attain a youthful appearance. The internet has become a seemingly inexhaustible source of remedies and treatments to enhance and preserve beauty: a search for 'skin care' on the popular search engine, Google, yielded over four million links to sites dealing with all sorts of products and treatments for the skin, many of them with prescriptions as unorthodox as the ones publicised in the 1800s and 1900s mentioned above. Clearly, practices such as these involve considerable physical and economic risk, but also psychological and social risk, if not competently performed.

Hopefulness in the economic domain may also lead to risk taking behaviour. In the psychological domain, research suggests that hope for achievement is linked with risk taking behaviour. Williams and Narendran found that managers with high needs for achievement were more likely to take risks in managerial decision making [61]. Hopefulness for fast money may lead consumers to gamble [62]. The internet is filled with offers to become rich almost overnight, from gambling (see [www.gambling.com](http://www.gambling.com) for a staggering menu of choices for online gambling), to 'business opportunities' to make money from home, including dubious pyramid schemes and other options of uncertain repute, as illustrated by sites as [www.money-at-home.com](http://www.money-at-home.com).

### 5.3 Coping and happiness

Finally, as a *positive emotion*, hopefulness may also affect how well consumers *cope* with adverse consumption environments. Hopefulness is often linked with coping and positive adaptation [21,50] perhaps because when situations appear bleak, all people have to hold onto is the idea that the goal congruent outcome is possible. As Averill et al. note, hopefulness 'nourishes, guides, uplifts, and supports a person in times of difficulty' [15, p.100].

When a goal incongruent outcome occurs or is anticipated, hopefulness may help us cope with its occurrence. Hopefulness has been shown to have positive psychological benefits in coping with medical illnesses, such as viewing aversive situations as having a silver lining and protecting individuals from negative moods. It has also been linked with



coping with aversive physical conditions. Individuals who are more hopeful that they will recover from illness show greater pain endurance, enact more proactive and more positive self-care practices, have delayed illness timing, and experience fewer severe illnesses and illnesses of shorter duration [23,48]. Hopefulness helps us cope with adverse circumstances by making salient the possibility of a brighter future.

In a consumption context, hopefulness may motivate and sustain consumers in difficult consumption contexts where coping resources are needed, such as loss of valued possessions through divorce, natural disasters, and institutionalisation. We are aware of no research that has examined the extent to which hopefulness moderates the devastating psychological impact of loss of possessions.

Hopefulness also helps consumers cope with *mundane life problems* (current concerns). Products and services are seen as instruments to achieving goals and are consumed since consumers are hopeful that they will indeed achieve these goals. Hopefulness can also help consumers cope with *goals they have, but cannot yet achieve* (due to personal, social, or situational factors). Studies in the health and psychology literatures support this effect [21,50]. Korner notes that hopefulness “allows partial fulfillment of unmet needs under the guise that it may one day be true” [63, p.134]. Consumers who see their goals as difficult *but possible* are more likely to be happy – hopefulness provides the key to believing that happiness is obtainable. Finally, hopefulness should affect consumers’ reactions to the final outcome of the goal pursuing process: it can help consumers cope when a goal congruent outcome fails to materialise, or moderate our reactions to goal attainment.

## 6 Discussion

We propose that hopefulness is a relevant consumer emotion arising in everyday consumption environments as people examine their current situation and address the ways in which product and services can make for a better future. Consumers feel hopeful about acquiring and/or using products to achieve goal congruent future outcomes in a broad array of life domains – from the economic to the interpersonal, the personality to the physical, and even the societal and spiritual. It is also a driving force affecting goal pursuit and achievement though it may also encourage risky behaviours and unorthodox consumption practices. This emotion may explain conditions under which consumer self-regulatory actions are effective, and it is likely to help consumers cope with adverse consumption outcomes.

Given the importance of hopefulness, it is critical to understand what factors induce hopefulness, particularly those under a marketer’s control. We propose that perceptions of the possibility of a goal congruent outcome (and hence hopefulness) are higher when marketers encourage the perception that the goal is easier to achieve than previously believed; the consumer or others like him or her have achieved the outcome in the past; the outcome is perceived to be under personal control and entails many pathways to achievement; and when consumers feel that luck is with them to make the outcome happen. The widespread use of the ‘hopefulness’ appeal attests to its effectiveness in affecting consumers’ attitudes, intentions, and actual purchase and use of a variety of products and services.

### 6.1 Future research issues

As described below, several additional questions regarding hopefulness deserve attention in future research.

*Measures of hopefulness.* Though several measures of hopefulness exist (as described below) not all are consistent with the definition of hopefulness offered here. For example, Snyder et al. developed a 6-item scale designed to measure hopefulness [64]. The measure has adequate psychometric properties (reliability, construct validity, discriminant validity, and convergent validity). Respondents answer statements that reflect *pathways*: (e.g., ‘If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it’; ‘there are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now’) and *agency* (‘Right now, I see myself as being pretty successful’; ‘at this time, I am meeting the goals I have set for myself’). The more pathways an individual identifies and the more s/he feels personally efficacious at achieving the goal, the more hopeful s/he is that the goal congruent outcome can be achieved. Unfortunately, since this measure appears to tap two *antecedents that drive hopefulness* (see Table 2) as opposed to hopefulness itself, it is likely to measure the hopefulness construct imperfectly. The construct also focuses on perceived success at achieving previously set goals as opposed to the feasibility of achieving a specific future goal congruent outcome. Several other scales appear to tap generalised optimism or wellbeing as opposed to hopefulness about achieving a specific goal congruent outcome [65,66].

Future research might focus on developing either a reflective or formative measure of consumer hopefulness. Researchers following the reflective approach to measurement follow the procedures for measure development advocated by Churchill [67] and rooted in classical test theory. Items are designed to ‘reflect’ or ‘indicate’ the underlying construct. Examples include such items as “I am very hopeful that buying this product will produce the outcome I’m looking for” or “when I think about the feelings that describe my views of the product, I’d have to say I feel hopeful”. A second approach involves the use of *formative* measures, indicators that *combine to determine* a specific construct [68]. *Formative measures are appropriate when a concept is said to be a function of or defined by its measures.* Such appears to be the case with hopefulness, which is defined by appraisals of possibility for a goal congruent outcome. As such, a formative measure of hopefulness should focus on the development of items designed to assess the extent to which a given outcome is goal congruent and possible.

*Ethical issues in the marketing of hopefulness.* Whilst consumer hopefulness may be ubiquitous, interesting questions about the extent to which hopefulness is good or bad and hence the ethical appropriateness of marketers’ attempts to enhance consumer hopefulness can be raised. Aristotle assumed that emotions, including hopefulness, could be appropriate or inappropriate, foolish or prudent [16]. Hence some view hope as an emotion that can be evaluated on a normative continuum [15], with individuals being susceptible to having ‘false hopes’. A number of consumer contexts can be identified in which consumers are hopeful for a goal congruent outcome, but should not be. In gambling and lotteries, for example, the probability of a big win is quite low, though optimistic tendencies may make consumers more hopeful that they will win than they should be. Beauty magazines, by virtue of presenting products juxtaposed with beautiful models, may make consumers hopeful that they too – by using this product – can look model perfect. Other cases are associated with less consumerism though they may have devastating consequences. Consumers who are, for example,

overly hopeful that good health will prevail, may fail to seek the advice of doctors, fail to avail themselves of health promotion and prevention techniques, and lead a less healthy lifestyle. As such, one can question the ethical value of marketers' attempts to enhance hopefulness. The long-term implications of linking hopefulness in a consumer context with overall happiness can also be raised. Achievement of a goal congruent state brings only momentary feelings of life satisfaction, as new goals, new challenges, and new upward comparisons, render the current situation unsatisfactory and evoke feelings of unhappiness. Ethical issues are hence raised by marketing tactics which appear to not only induce hopefulness but imply that achievement of the goal congruent outcome will create lasting happiness – an outcome almost impossible to achieve given the elusive nature of this ultimate end state.

*Cross-cultural differences and hopefulness.* The linkage of hope with achievement, competition and control also begs the question about differences among cultures in hopefulness. Whilst we have long described various cultures as having a fatalistic view of the future, it is possible that the opposite of fatalism is linked with pessimism and hopelessness, whilst a lack of fatalism with hopefulness and optimism. Since fatalism seems to imply lack of control over outcomes if hope is linked with consumption, we should see less consumption orientation among cultures with a more fatalistic orientation. To date, we are aware of no work that has examined hopefulness across cultures.

It is clear that the concept of hopefulness is rich in its potential to provide insight into consumer behaviour. Whilst this has not been a comprehensive identification of the relevance of this concept to consumer behaviour, 'hopefully' the issues identified herein will serve as the basis for future empirical work on the concept in consumer behaviour.

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