



Experiences and happiness: The role of gender

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Abstract

It is well established that experiences make people happy, but we still know little about how individual differences affect the relationship between consumption of experiences and happiness. This study focuses on gender as the predictor of happiness and addresses the following question: Do women and men differ in the way they attain happiness from consumption of experiences? Considering that research shows that women and men differ in how they process information, it is possible that they differ in how much they reflect on an experience too. Therefore, this study also investigates how the relationship between consumption of experiences and gender is moderated by Need for Cognition (NFC) in affecting subjective happiness. The results of a survey of adult consumers show that women derive more happiness and life satisfaction from meaningful experiences than men whereas men derive more happiness and satisfaction with life from pleasurable experiences than women. NFC moderates these results. The study provides evidence for the distinction between pleasure and meaning in consumption contexts and for the important role of gender in consumption of experiences. Its results imply that design and structuring of commercial experiences should take customer gender into account.

KEYWORDS

consumption of experiences, gender, happiness, need for cognition

1 | INTRODUCTION

Based on the findings from many happiness surveys, one trend is clearly observable in the United States: women, in comparison to men, have become less happy with their lives since the early 1970s (Dowd, 2009). This trend is puzzling considering the increasing presence of women in the workforce and the impact of the second wave of feminism on the positive changes in contemporary social conditions (Filipovic, 2017). Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) argue that women—more so than men—may find it difficult to achieve and maintain the same degree of satisfaction in multiple domains, for

example, “satisfaction at work” and “satisfaction at home.” This difficulty in balancing work and family roles makes it difficult for them to achieve happiness simultaneously in both domains and may have resulted in the falling average happiness for women. However, it may also be a case that women and men differ in how they seek happiness and what happiness means to them. The present research explores this idea in a consumer context. That is, we want to understand if and how female and male consumers differ in pursuing happiness through consumption of experiences.

Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) have presented a thorough review of existing psychological and consumer research on gender

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differences. According to these authors, women and men construe their social identities and process information differently. These differences, in turn, may affect the behaviors of the two genders when engaging, for example, in shopping and in other consumption activities (Dennis et al., 2018). In addition, there may be more subtle, yet fundamental, gender differences related to consumption in general. This paper presents research on consumption of experiences and how they affect female and male consumer happiness. The central argument of the present research is that women and men construe the very concept of happiness, and how consumption of experiences makes them happy, differently.

Since Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) first proposed the idea of experiential consumption, consumption has been viewed as a means to achieve certain outcomes in life. While consumption per se—measured objectively in terms of money or time invested—does not always lead to subjective happiness (Durning, 1993; La Barbera & Gürhan, 1997), psychological research has established that the consumption of certain types of products does lead to greater happiness. For example, numerous studies have shown that an experiential purchase and consumption (“an event or series of events that you personally encounter or live through”) compared to a material one (“a tangible object that you obtain and keep in your possession”) leads to higher levels of general happiness (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; p. 1194). The present study builds on this study showing differential effects related to consumption and happiness. Similar to differentiating purchases into experiential and material, it makes conceptual sense to stop treating the concept of happiness as a unidimensional construct when studying how consumption impacts happiness (Schmitt et al., 2015). Following the positive psychology literature, individuals can pursue at least two distinct paths toward achieving happiness: the *pleasure* path—which stresses sensorial, pleasurable moments or episodes (Kahneman et al., 1999)—and the *meaning* path, which stresses the pursuit of personal fulfillment through meaningful activities (Waterman, 1993).

While some scholars may have biased their research toward the pleasure dimension by considering primarily hedonic and aesthetics pleasure, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), others have implicitly contrasted “fleeting joy” with “more substantial contributions to well-being” (Gilovich et al., 2015). Yet, in positive psychology, both paths to happiness are equally relevant in consumers' lives. Therefore, a complete understanding of consumer happiness as part of consumption requires studying both pleasure and meaning happiness.

Most importantly, by implicitly focusing on only one dimension of happiness—pleasure or meaning—and ignoring or neglecting the other dimension, previous research on happiness resulting from consumption may have masked gender differences. That is, everyday pursuit of happiness through consumption may differ between women and men.

Finally, considering that the two genders differ in how (and how much) they process information (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015), it is possible that women and men also differ on how much they reflect on an experience. Thinking and ruminating about the

experience that someone has had may not only affect how much happiness that person gets from the experience, but also maybe the type of happiness attained. If this is the case, it could be that the relationship between meaningful or pleasurable consumption and gender is moderated by Need for Cognition (NFC) (Cacioppo et al., 1984). Note that Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) have argued that NFC may be a key, yet relatively underexplored, predictor of gender-specific information processing strategies in general, and it should affect women and men differently. Therefore, this study also investigates how the relationship between consumption of experiences and gender is moderated by NFC in affecting subjective happiness.

By accounting for the role of gender, the present research contributes theoretically to the literature on consumption of experiences and happiness. While that literature repeatedly shows that experiential consumption boosts happiness (Gilovich et al., 2015), it has not yet studied if the magnitude of the boost in happiness is consistent for women and for men. That literature has also not studied how experiential consumption affects specific types of happiness, that is, the meaning and the pleasure women and men get from experiences. Finally, by investigating how NFC moderates the relationship between the gender and the happiness derived from consumption, the present research empirically addresses the assertion made by Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) that NFC is a potentially important moderator of information processing strategies of the two sexes. Thus, it also contributes to the broader literature on gender differences in consumer research.

The predictions are tested using a survey of adult consumers.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Happiness in positive psychology and consumer research

Positive psychology is regarded by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 5), as “a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits and positive institutions.” Positive psychology stresses positive experiences (e.g., well-being, contentment, satisfaction, hope, optimism) and positive individual traits (e.g., perseverance, originality, purpose). The aim is to supplement, not to replace, what is known about human suffering, weakness, and disorder, to have a more balanced and complete understanding of the human experience (Seligman et al., 2005). The ongoing debate on the conceptual, as well as methodological merits of positive psychology, has led to sharper conceptual and empirical contributions. Researchers have elaborated on the concept of happiness and have conceptualized and empirically validated it in more complex ways, which led to the development of happiness as a multi-faceted concept (Seligman, 2011). This idea is relevant to marketing because it allows for a market segmentation and for

multiple marketing strategies to generate customer happiness and potentially loyalty.

Specifically, Peterson et al. (2005) developed a model with three orientations to happiness—pleasure, meaning, and engagement (i.e., experiencing a state of flow when being absorbed in an activity). The focus of this paper is on pleasure and meaning. Pleasure represents a hedonic approach to happiness, which focuses on enjoyable and positive experiences. The goal is to maximize pleasure and decrease pain (Baumeister et al., 2013). Happiness as meaning concerns values and virtues and is also referred to as personal fulfillment. The goal here is to derive gratification by being true to oneself.

In an endeavor to account for the universality of human experience and focusing on positive values that anyone appreciates, positive psychology has largely ignored how individual differences influence attainment of happiness. Seligman and Pawelski (2003, p. 162) explicitly state: “The success of positive psychology will be dependent on its ability to identify and study strengths and virtues that are valued by persons regardless of their culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and nationality.” One exception is the work by Roothman et al. (2003). Using a meta-analysis, the aim of their research was to uncover if men and women differ on various aspects of psychological well-being. Men scored higher on few traits (e.g., physical self-concept, automatic thoughts, cognitive flexibility, total self-concept, fortitude), and women scored higher on few other traits (e.g., expression of affect, religious well-being). No gender differences were uncovered for sense of coherence, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, and the social components of self-concept and of fortitude. Seligman et al. (2005) did find that older people were in general happier and less depressed than young people (see also Mogilner et al., 2011), but gender and ethnicity were not associated with happiness or depression in their study.

In conclusion, positive psychology has not investigated gender differences in attainment of happiness. It has not studied if women and men differ in getting different types of happiness (i.e., meaning or pleasure) from experiences. As we will see, this also is the case in consumer research.

In their recent review of the consumer literature on experiential advantage—the finding that consumers yield greater happiness from consuming experiences than from consuming material objects—, Weingarten and Goodman (2021) note that still little is known about the boundary effects or moderators of this finding. They proceed to do a meta-analysis of these studies by focusing on many variables that potentially could alter or attenuate the experiential advantage effect. Weingarten and Goodman (2021, p. 862, footnote 2), however, do not investigate the gender effects noting that they “attempted to code the sample gender composition... [but] were unsuccessful due to insufficient information and infrequent occurrence” of gender data in those studies. This suggests that consumer research on experiential advantage and on consumption and happiness in general has also neglected the role of gender.

Finally, when focusing on consumer happiness, consumer research has exhibited a strong hedonic bias, that is, it has focused on pleasure at the expense of meaning (for a review, see Gupta,

2019). Even when it focuses on happiness as meaning, which is seldom, gender differences are ignored (Catapano et al., 2022).

In conclusion, when it comes to investigating how consumers get happiness from experiences, consumer research has neglected the role of gender. This is the gap that the present research aims to address.

2.2 | Constructs and hypotheses development

The key constructs in this study are gender, and then happiness and life satisfaction, the two most important concepts in positive psychology.

For empirical reasons, this study does not differentiate between the constructs of gender and sex. Note that this is also the approach used in most, if not all, survey-based and experimental consumer studies on gender differences (for a review see Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). Clearly, there is no perfect match between sex and gender because sex is a biological category whereas gender is a socio-cultural construct (Bem, 1974). In other words, possible differences in how women and men get happiness from consumption of experiences might be framed as a “nature versus nurture” problem. This study cannot resolve this problem (as it lacks the appropriate data), but we will address it in the general discussion.

As mentioned earlier, the two paths to general happiness (Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman, 2011), which are relevant for any consumption context, are: (a) a eudaimonic path, where people experience the fulfillment of meaningful goals (e.g., eating a Sunday lunch with family) (Waterman, 1993) and (b) a hedonic path, where people experience pleasure (e.g., eating a succulent roast) (Kahneman et al., 1999). The eudaimonic approach stresses that happiness results from engaging in personally fulfilling activities in the search for lasting meaning (Baumeister et al., 2013). The hedonic approach stresses that happiness results from experiencing pleasurable moments or episodes in life.

Many definitions of happiness exist as well as many ways how happiness is measured (Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009). The dictionary says that happiness is a “a state of well-being and contentment; a pleasurable or satisfying experience” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2009). Subjective happiness is sometimes defined as a global, subjective assessment of whether one is a happy or an unhappy person and it is often referred to as subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The focus of this study is on the subjective happiness in the moment, which is attributed to a consumption of experience (for a review see Gilovich et al., 2015). Drawing from Mead’s (2002/1932) pragmatic philosophy and his notion that all experiences necessarily take place in the present, McKenzie (2018) refers to this construct as happiness in the present. We refer to it as subjective happiness to be consistent with the literature in positive psychology, which has informed a lot of research on consumer happiness. It is *subjective* because the notion of happiness is specific to individuals and it is understood as a subjective appreciation of one’s life circumstances in the absence of any

objective standard (Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009; Mogilner et al., 2011; Veenhoven, 1991).

Ultimately, subjective happiness contributes to perceived life satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1977; Kahneman et al., 2004). Perceived life satisfaction, or simply life satisfaction, is defined as a judgment resulting from an assessment of a person's quality of life according to individually chosen criteria (Diener et al., 1985). It typically goes beyond momentary feelings to invoke an integrative assessment of one's life (Baumeister et al., 2013).

Some authors argue that the human genetic program "predefines" subjective happiness to a large extent (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), but specific life circumstances also affect happiness (Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009). In this study, the specific context that can boost subjective happiness is consumption of an experience (Gilovich et al., 2015). If people are happy because of consuming experiences, then it must be the case that, through consumption of experiences, consumers are able to embrace their values, cultivate them, and live in accordance with them (Baumeister et al., 2013), or that consumption of experiences gives consumers pleasure (with little or no pain).

Thus, when consumption episodes successfully evoke either personal fulfillment (i.e., meaning) or pleasure, consumers' subjective happiness increases and, in turn, their satisfaction with life. Formally, the following hypotheses are advanced (the predictions are summarized in Figure 1):

- H1a.** *Meaning (personal fulfillment), as an outcome of consuming an experience, directly and positively affects subjective happiness.*
- H1b.** *Meaning (personal fulfillment), as an outcome of consuming an experience, directly and positively affects satisfaction with life.*
- H2a.** *Pleasure, as an outcome of consuming an experience, directly and positively affects subjective happiness.*

H2b. *Pleasure, as an outcome of consuming an experience, directly and positively affects satisfaction with life.*

Moreover, because subjective happiness is an emotion-laden outcome of consumption, when consumers judge to what extent a consumption episode makes them happy, they elaborate on the evoked positive emotions (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). This is especially the case when those emotions are activated at the outset of the consumption episode (Wyer & Srull, 1986). This elaboration then unfolds during and immediately after the consumption episode. Therefore, if consumers devote sufficient attentional resources to the encoding and processing of the consumption-evoked positive emotions, these emotions are also likely to influence positively consumers' postconsumption retrospective judgments (affect-as-information; Pham, 1998), including their judgments of how satisfied they are with their lives. Second, happiness and satisfaction with life have been shown to be related. Importantly, satisfaction with life is more stable and enduring than momentary subjective happiness and therefore more meaningful than in-the-moment happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Thus, to complete the model, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. *Subjective happiness is positively related to satisfaction with life.*

How could gender influence the relation between experience, and happiness and life satisfaction? Extant research shows that men and women process information and make decisions differently because of evolutionary reasons that are reinforced culturally and socially (Eagly & Wood, 2013). For example, men process information in a more focused way, while women are more flexible and process across categories. Men use less effortful heuristics and focus on salient or easily accessible cues. In contrast, women are bilateral thinkers; they elaborate and ruminate more than men. Regarding

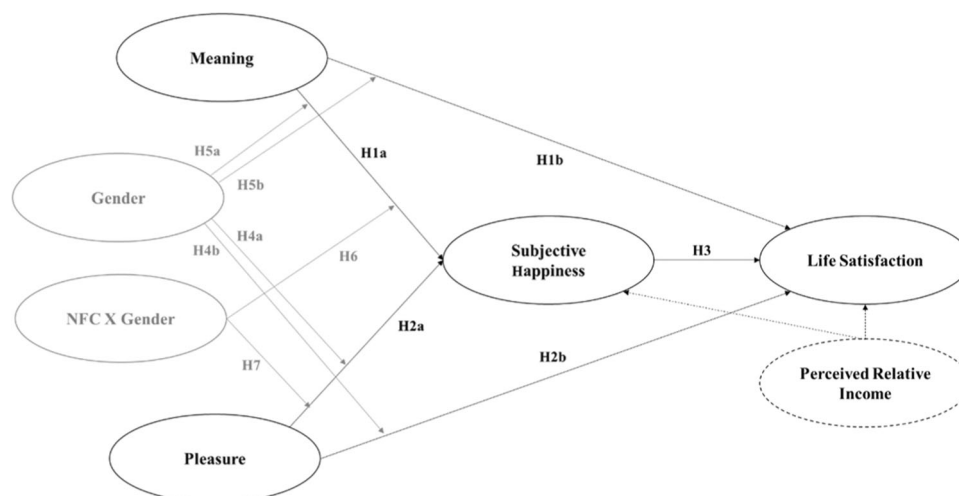


FIGURE 1 The hypothesized model.

their selves, men have a more independent self-concept, while women construe their selves by thinking more of others and incorporating others into their own self-concept. Men are more self-oriented and assertive. That is, when men want something, they behave as if they are “on a mission” to get it (Dennis et al., 2018). In contrast, women focus more broadly—and on emotions—and are better empathizers than men (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015).

Men should be relatively more pleasure-oriented due to their focus on immediacy and independence as well as their desire for instant gratification (Silverman, 2003). However, women should be relatively more meaning-oriented because of a noted focus on relationships, emotions, and their abilities to empathize and delay gratification. Therefore, the following hypotheses should hold:

- H4a.** *Men derive more subjective happiness from pleasurable experiences than women.*
- H4b.** *Men derive more satisfaction with life from pleasurable experiences than women.*
- H5a.** *Women derive more subjective happiness from meaningful (personally fulfilling) experiences than men.*
- H5b.** *Women derive more satisfaction with life from meaningful (personally fulfilling) experiences than men.*

Reflecting on an experience and assessing to what extent it has been meaningful (i.e., personally fulfilling) should be more cognitively demanding than assessing the pleasure one gets from that experience. That is because pleasure is a visceral, immediate, embodied, hedonic outcome of consumption (Read et al., 1999), while ruminating about the meaning requires evaluating the consumption episode from multiple perspectives in a more controlled, deliberate manner. We also know that women process information more comprehensively than men whereas men, compared to women, process information in less cognitively demanding ways (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). For example, women react more positively to visually, lexically, and informationally complex ads than men. Importantly, consumers high in NFC also react more positively to such ads than consumers low in NFC (Putrevu et al., 2004).

Therefore, Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) claim that NFC should have a differential impact on inference making and judgments for the two genders. Specifically, NFC should strongly affect men such that men who are high in NFC more readily extract and process demanding, high-level, abstract information than men who are low in NFC. In other words, men who have high NFC should process information more like women in general. The impact of NFC on women should be weaker, because they naturally attend to and process both low-level concrete and high-level abstract information comprehensively (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991). Therefore, NFC should interact with gender in affecting subjective happiness in such a way that high-NFC men, like women, should be able extract happiness from meaningful experiences.

- H6.** *NFC strengthens the positive relationship between meaningful consumption and subjective happiness for men, but not for women.*

On the other hand, when women engage in pleasurable consumption, the evoked pleasure may be detrimental to subjective happiness because upon reflection, female consumers may consider such a consumption episode as frivolous and unnecessary (Lascu, 1991). This may give rise to a feeling of guilt (Boujbel & d'Astous, 2015; Thompson, 1996). We expect this effect to be strong in everyday life because women must juggle—perhaps still more than men (Thompson, 1996)—their time, money, priorities, and responsibilities between engaging in pleasurable, frivolous consumption and practical, goal-directed, necessary consumption. Compared to low-NFC women, it is likely that high-NFC women are more likely to engage in this post-consumption reflection, which then negatively affects the pleasure they derive from consumption. The following hypothesis should thus hold:

- H7.** *NFC weakens the positive relationship between the pleasurable consumption and the subjective happiness for women, but not for men.*

Note that hypotheses six and seven are expressed for subjective happiness; analogous interaction effects for satisfaction with life are not offered but are controlled for in the proposed model. Following temporal construal theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), pleasure and meaning—evoked by specific consumption episodes—are concrete, diagnostic cues for consumers when they assess their immediate, momentary happiness from a direct experience. Thinking about satisfaction with life requires a shift from a short- to a long-term perspective and assessing one's life in more abstract terms, which is removed from the specific consumption episodes.

Finally, considering inconsistent results in previous research regarding the relationship between income, happiness, and life satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2004; La Barbera & Gürhan, 1997), perceived (subjective) relative income is controlled in the proposed model. Moreover, when people judge adequacy of their income, they inevitably compare themselves to other people (Ackerman & Paolucci, 1983; Solnick & Hemenway, 1998). In other words, some people are satisfied with a relatively modest income, whereas some are dissatisfied with a relatively excessive income.

3 | SURVEY

A market research service distributed the questionnaire to 302 adults in the United Kingdom, but 164 respondents did not fully complete the questionnaire. Therefore, the final sample included 138 adult respondents (women = 50%, mean age = 40.0 years, SD = 11.9, minimum age = 25 years, maximum age = 72 years). There was no systematic difference in the gender split between the larger sample and the final sample ($\chi^2(1) = 0.42$, NS). Respondents were asked to think of a recent experience that made them happy and to describe this experience using their own words. They were also told that this

experience might have involved “any object, activity, person, purchase, or anything else that made them happy” and that it could have been “something that you consumed or experienced in private or in public, alone or with other people.”

Next, the respondents answered the questions assessing the constructs in the proposed model (see Figure 1). Multiple methods exist for assessment of happiness (review in Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009). The research on experiential advantage (Gilovich et al., 2015), for example, uses a single-item measure of happiness. To assess pleasure, consumer researchers have used either ad hoc measures or pleasure-related items (e.g., joy) from affect scales (e.g., PANAS). To assess meaning or personal fulfillment, they typically rely on ad hoc scales (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). To generate the measurement items that would make sense to the respondents in the context of our study and have face validity, we needed to adapt existing scales from positive psychology and combine them, when necessary, with the items that the relevant consumer research has used before.

The assessed constructs in the proposed model are pleasure (captured with items such as “This experience gave me pleasure.”) and meaning (e.g., “This experience was personally fulfilling.”); subjective happiness from experience (e.g., “This experience made me happy.”); subjective life satisfaction (e.g., “This experience made me satisfied with my life.”); and NFC (a truncated version of the scale [Cacioppo et al., 1984]). Finally, the respondents also provided the relevant socio-demographic information, including the perceived relative income (i.e., subjective income relative to others and measured on a five-point scale), age, and, most importantly, gender. Please refer to Table 1 for all measures and their sources. Note that perceived income is understood as subjective appreciation of money available in the absence of any objective standard such as, for example, (national) average income or income distribution (Ackerman & Paolucci, 1983; Solnick & Hemenway, 1998).

3.1 | Analysis and results

3.1.1 | Qualitative analysis and results

Using an agreed coding scheme, two independent coders analyzed participants' descriptions of the experience they thought of when answering the questionnaire. The coding scheme was developed after reading consumers' responses and considering the concepts examined in the current research. The coding scheme included: (1) the type of experience that a participant described; (2) the type of recalled happiness (pleasure, meaning) stemming from the experience; and (3) the social nature of the experience (individual, communal). Coders independently coded the descriptions provided by study participants, then compared their coding. The overall portion of underjudge agreement was 90.6% (83.3% for activity type; 93.5% for social nature of activity; and 94.3% for happiness type), which is satisfactory. The coders managed to resolve all the conflicts and developed an agreed coding which was then analyzed.

Study participants recalled a wide range of experiences (see Table 2) including those centered on life milestones (23.9%), social relationships (19.6%), shopping (9.4%), physical activities (8.7%), receiving an award/acknowledgment (8.7%), traveling (7.2%), entertainment (6.5%), romantic love (4.3%), nature (3.6%), overcoming hardship (2.9%), reading (1.4%), gaming (0.7%), eating, (0.7%), and others (2.2%).

Regarding our central research question, there was a clear relationship between the type of happiness recalled and gender (see Table 3). The frequency of pleasure was significantly higher for male respondents ($n = 40$, percentage = 29.6%) than for female respondents ($n = 29$, percentage = 21.5%) ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the frequency of meaning was significantly higher for female respondents ($n = 39$, percentage = 28.9%) than for male respondents ($n = 27$, percentage = 20.0%) ($p < 0.05$). While these results cannot be used for hypothesis testing, they nevertheless offer preliminary evidence supporting our key predictions. Note that three respondents were excluded from the analysis as they did recall an experience, but they failed to describe it in sufficient detail to enable coding.

We also look at the qualitative data regarding the social nature of the recalled experience. While the social nature of experience does not speak directly to the proposed theory, we explore if it is related to gender. We will return to this issue later when we discuss if nature or nurture structure how the two genders get happiness from experiences. The results show that gender and the social nature of experience are related too (see Table 4). The frequency of individual experiences was significantly higher for male respondents ($n = 35$, percentage = 25.9%) than for female respondents ($n = 21$, percentage = 15.7%) ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the frequency of communal experiences was significantly higher for female respondents ($n = 47$, percentage = 34.8%) than for male respondents ($n = 32$, percentage = 23.7%) ($p < 0.05$). Again, three respondents were excluded from the analysis for the same reason as above.

Examples of verbatims showing recalled individual versus communal experiences, as well as pleasure and meaning happiness, are in Table 5.

3.1.2 | Quantitative analysis and results

Considering our sample size, $N = 138$ (i.e., close to 140), and the number of latent factors in our model, we first check the model's statistical power. Following the recommendations by Wolf et al. (2013), we used a stringent criterion for the cut off values in our confirmatory measurement model; we only retained an item if its loading was 0.80 (rounded value) or greater. According to Wolf et al. (2013) (see figure 3 in their paper), this gives a minimum power (for smallest estimated parameter of interest) of approximately 0.87 and the model is unbiased (i.e., parameter or standard error estimates do not exceed 5%) (see Table 3 in Wolf et al., 2013). Therefore, our sample size is relatively small, but it should be good enough to estimate the proposed structural model and carry out the analysis.

TABLE 1 Constructs and measurement scales

| Constructs | Construct items | References |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Pleasure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This experience was pleasurable (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience was enjoyable (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience was fun (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") | Adapted from Peterson et al. (2005) |
| Meaning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This experience was meaningful to me (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience made me feel that life is rewarding (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience was personally fulfilling (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") | Adapted from Peterson et al. (2005) and from Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) |
| Subjective happiness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This experience made me happy (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience made me joyful (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience made me depressed (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; reverse coded) This experience made me sad (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; reverse coded)—dropped after CFA This experience was elating (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree")—dropped after CFA | Adapted from Diener et al. (2010), from Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999), and from Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) |
| Life satisfaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This experience made my life closer to my ideal (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience made the conditions of my life excellent (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") This experience made me satisfied with my life (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") Having a similar experience again would improve my life satisfaction (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree")—dropped after CFA | Adapted from Diener et al. (1985) |
| Need of Cognition (NFC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would prefer complex to simple problems (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree") | Taken from Cacioppo et al. (1984) |
| Perceived relative income | 1 = "significantly below average," 2 = "below average," 3 = "average," 4 = "above average", and 5 = "significantly above average" | Taken from U.S. General Social Survey (2016) |

The Composite Reliability of all the constructs is more than 0.7 suggesting adequate levels of reliability. Considering the convergent validity, Average Variances Extracted (AVE) are all above 0.6. For the discriminant validity test, the Maximum Shared Variance and the Average Shared Variance are both less than AVE. All the square roots of AVE are also greater than inter-construct correlations, suggesting a good validity of the measurement model (see Table 6 for details).

Structural equation analysis is carried out in two steps: the first step tests a general model, while the second step tests whether the

relationships in such model are moderated by gender. This analysis is conducted on the aggregate sample first (men and women respondents together) and then separately for men and women samples. The aggregate model shows a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(12) = 35.32$, $CMIN/DF = 2.94$, $CFI = 0.95$, $RMSEA = 0.08$.

Adding the moderating effects of the NFC on the paths from pleasure and meaning to subjective happiness as well as from pleasure and meaning to life satisfaction resulted in an excellent fit of the model: $\chi^2(15) = 23.01$, $CMIN/DF = 1.53$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.04$.

TABLE 2 Experiences reported by study participants

| | Male consumers N (%) | Female consumers N (%) | Total N (%) |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Life milestone | 17 (12.3) | 16 (11.6) | 33 (23.9) |
| Social relationships | 7 (5.1) | 20 (14.5) | 27 (19.6) |
| Shopping | 6 (4.3) | 7 (5.1) | 13 (9.4) |
| Physical activities | 5 (3.6) | 7 (5.1) | 12 (8.7) |
| Award/prize | 8 (5.8) | 4 (2.9) | 12 (8.7) |
| Traveling | 5 (3.6) | 5 (3.6) | 10 (7.2) |
| Entertainment | 6 (4.3) | 3 (2.2) | 9 (6.5) |
| Romantic love | 4 (2.9) | 2 (1.4) | 6 (4.3) |
| Nature | 3 (2.2) | 2 (1.4) | 5 (3.6) |
| Hardship | 3 (2.2) | 1 (0.7) | 4 (2.9) |
| Reading | 2 (1.4) | 0 | 2 (1.4) |
| Gaming | 0 | 1 (0.7) | 1 (0.7) |
| Eating | 1 (0.7) | 0 | 1 (0.7) |
| Other | 2 (1.4) | 1 (0.7) | 3 (2.2) |
| Total | 69 (50) | 69 (50) | 138 (100) |

TABLE 3 Gender × happiness type

| | Male consumers N (%) | Female consumers N (%) | Total N (%) |
|-------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Pleasure | 40 _a (29.6) | 29 _b (21.5) | 69 (51.1) |
| Meaning | 27 _a (20) | 39 _b (28.9) | 66 (48.9) |
| Total N (%) | 67 (49.6) | 68 (50.4) | 135 (100) |

Note: Each subscript letter denotes a subset of gender categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the 0.05 level.

TABLE 4 Gender × social nature of the experience

| | Male consumers N (%) | Female consumers N (%) | Total N (%) |
|-------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Individual | 35 _a (25.9) | 21 _b (15.65) | 56 (42.5) |
| Communal | 32 _a (23.7) | 47 _b (34.8) | 79 (58.8) |
| Total N (%) | 67 (49.6) | 68 (50.4) | 135 (100) |

Note: Each subscript letter denotes a subset of gender categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the 0.05 level.

The predicted interactions are present and significant in the men and the women samples. The detailed results are reported in Table 7 and in Figure 2 (two-gender analysis).

As can be seen in Table 7, in the column for aggregate sample (both women and men included), the standardized coefficients for the

TABLE 5 Examples of verbatims

- *Individual experience, pleasure happiness* "Spending some time watching a few of the 'Rap Battles of History' videos on the internet, they were extremely funny. I watched them on my laptop at home whilst relaxing in my own time. I have not laughed so hard in ages." (Respondent #3, male)"Very recent I had an Indian meal the taste virtue food was amazing best ever the herbs and spices texture brill." (Respondent #43, male).
- *Individual experience, meaning happiness* "Orpington, Kent - moving into my first house. This represented for me a major achievement after years of saving during a house price boom and enduring years of grueling commuting. Quite apart from the excitement of buying a first property, I always knew that it was going to be transformative experience for me because of the freedom and quality of life it would give me. It would not be a major exaggeration to say that life now feels like a permanent holiday." (Respondent #98, male)"I was very happy to pass my driving test at the age of 53 at my 2nd attempt. The freedom and safety that a car brought to me after cycling everywhere, including back from work at any time of the night, gave me confidence and comfort and security. Don't ever throw away a license by doing silly things like speeding or drink driving, it is a privilege to have the freedom to drive and makes life so much easier." (Respondent #18, female).
- *Communal experience, pleasure happiness* "Going on holiday to Spain with my friends. I had a great time with them and shared many fun experiences that I will remember for a long time." (Respondent #59, male) "A night away staying in the village at Portmeirion in Wales, we had a suite which was a luxury to me and a view of the sea out of 4 windows, a lovely sight to wake up to! Also, staying the village at Portmeirion was great and made me happy as I just love walking round the village and the woods and seeing something new every time I go." (Respondent #7, female)
- *Communal experience, meaning happiness* "I had been planning to move house back to the area that i was born for 10 years. I was living 40 miles away in another town with my girlfriend. We planned to move house when her father passed away, and this year in April, he sadly died, so we started to think about moving. And in October it finally happened. We are now living in the area i was born, I now have my eldest son living with us, and my partner has her dream job, so the last 6/7 weeks have been the best for some time, we have a house, and slowly getting it to look how we want it. So the future is now bright for us." (Respondent #19, male) "I was at work when someone was nasty to me. A friend heard about it and rang me the next day to check I was okay. She offered me support and advised me how to make a complaint should I have wished to. Another friend gave me a hug. these things made me happy as my friends care for my wellbeing and love me." (Respondent #37, female)

paths going from meaningful consumption to subjective happiness and to life satisfaction are both positive— $\beta = 0.331$ and $\beta = 0.416$, respectively—and significant ($p < 0.001$), therefore supporting hypotheses H1a and H1b. The structural path coefficient between pleasurable consumption and subjective happiness is 0.082 and it is not significant. However, the structural path coefficient between pleasurable consumption and life satisfaction is 0.609 and it is significant ($p < 0.01$). Hence, hypothesis H2a is not supported, but hypothesis H2b is supported.

TABLE 6 Results: CFA validity and reliability, factor correlation matrix with square root of the AVE

| | CR | AVE | MSV | ASV | Subjective Happiness | Meaning | Pleasure | Life Satisfaction |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|----------------------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Subjective happiness | 0.93 | 0.82 | 0.24 | 0.15 | 0.90 | | | |
| Meaning | 0.84 | 0.64 | 0.29 | 0.18 | 0.42 | 0.80 | | |
| Pleasure | 0.86 | 0.67 | 0.42 | 0.18 | 0.21 | 0.26 | 0.82 | |
| Life satisfaction | 0.88 | 0.70 | 0.42 | 0.32 | 0.49 | 0.53 | 0.65 | 0.84 |

Abbreviations: AVE, Average Variance Extracted; ASV, Average Shared Variance; CR, Composite Reliability; MSV, Maximum Shared Variance.

Note: the square roots of the AVE are on the diagonal (in *italics*).

TABLE 7 Results: How meaning and pleasure attributed to consumed experience affect subjective happiness and life satisfaction—estimated structural paths

| | $\Delta\chi^2$ | Aggregate sample $\beta(t)$ | Men sample $\beta(t)$ | Women sample $\beta(t)$ | |
|--|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Meaning → Life Satisfaction | 9.293 | 0.331 (8.487) ^{***} | 0.178 (3.633) ^{***} | 0.48 (8.421) ^{***} | H1b supported H5b supported |
| Pleasure → Life Satisfaction | 9.785 | 0.609 (12.429) ^{***} | 0.732 (13.071) ^{***} | 0.45 (4.839) ^{***} | H2b supported H4b supported |
| Meaning → Subjective Happiness | 9.140 | 0.416 (6.209) ^{***} | 0.327 (3.940) ^{***} | 0.476 (4.577) ^{***} | H1a supported H5a supported |
| Pleasure → Subjective Happiness | - | 0.082 (0.882) ^{ns} | 0.152 (1.535) ^{ns} | 0.079 (0.416) ^{ns} | H2a not supported H4a not supported |
| Subjective Happiness → Life Satisfaction | 8.778 | 0.332 (3.388) ^{***} | 0.373 (3.033) ^{***} | 0.296 (1.897) ^{***} | H3 supported |
| NFC × Meaning → Subjective Happiness | 8.622 | 0.107 (1.029) ^{ns} | 0.294 (2.450) ^{***} | -0.077(-0.445) ^{ns} | H6 supported |
| NFC × Pleasure → Subjective Happiness | 7.779 | 0.129 (1.112) ^{ns} | 0.392 (3.267) ^{***} | -0.230 (-1.836) ^{**} | H7 supported |
| NFC × Pleasure → Life Satisfaction | - | 0.030 (0.484) ^{ns} | 0.028 (0.364) ^{ns} | 0.052 (0.371) ^{ns} | Expected result ^a |
| NFC × Meaning → Life Satisfaction | - | 0.043 (0.782) ^{ns} | 0.035 (0.461) ^{ns} | 0.025 (0.294) ^{ns} | Expected result ^a |
| Perceived Relative Income → Subjective Happiness | - | 0.275 (6.548) ^{***} | 0.26 (4.194) ^{***} | 0.259 (4.625) ^{***} | |
| Perceived Relative Income → Life Satisfaction | - | -0.029 (-0.527) ^{ns} | -0.218 (-0.344) ^{ns} | -0.330 (-0.245) ^{ns} | |

Note: Structural path coefficients are standardized; ns, not significant; structural coefficients are significantly different between men and women groups at $p < 0.01$ at the path level for all comparisons for which $\Delta\chi^2$ is indicated; Δdf , 16 for all path differences.

Abbreviation: NFC, Need of Cognition.

^anull effects not predicted formally.

^{***} $p < 0.01$.; ^{**} $p < 0.05$.

As predicted, subjective happiness and life satisfaction are positively related— $\beta = 0.332$ —and this relationship is significant ($p < 0.01$). So, hypothesis H3 is also supported.

After splitting the aggregate sample based on gender, the two-group analysis investigates whether men and women differ in how much subjective happiness they derive from meaningful and from pleasurable consumption. Women and men differ in the extent pleasurable consumption contributes to their life satisfaction, but not to their subjective happiness. As predicted, men derive more life satisfaction from pleasure ($\beta = 0.732$, $p < 0.01$) than women do ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and, by itself, this difference is significant (i.e., the difference in $\chi^2(16)$ between the groups is 9.79, $p < 0.01$). However, men and women appear not to differ in how much pleasurable consumption affects their subjective happiness—in the

male sample $\beta = 0.152$, in female $\beta = 0.079$, but the difference is not significant. Therefore, H4b is supported, but H4a is not.

Women and men differ in the extent meaningful consumption contributes to their subjective happiness and to their life satisfaction. As predicted, women get more happiness from meaningful consumption ($\beta = 0.476$, $p < 0.01$) than men do ($\beta = 0.327$, $p < 0.01$). This difference is significant (the difference in $\chi^2(16)$ between the groups is 9.14, $p < 0.01$). Women also get more life satisfaction from meaningful consumption ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < 0.01$) than men do ($\beta = 0.178$, $p < 0.01$). This difference is significant too (the difference in $\chi^2(16)$ between the groups is 9.29, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H5a and H5b are fully supported.

While the two-way interaction between the NFC and meaning is not significant in aggregate sample ($\beta = 0.107$, NS), it is positive and

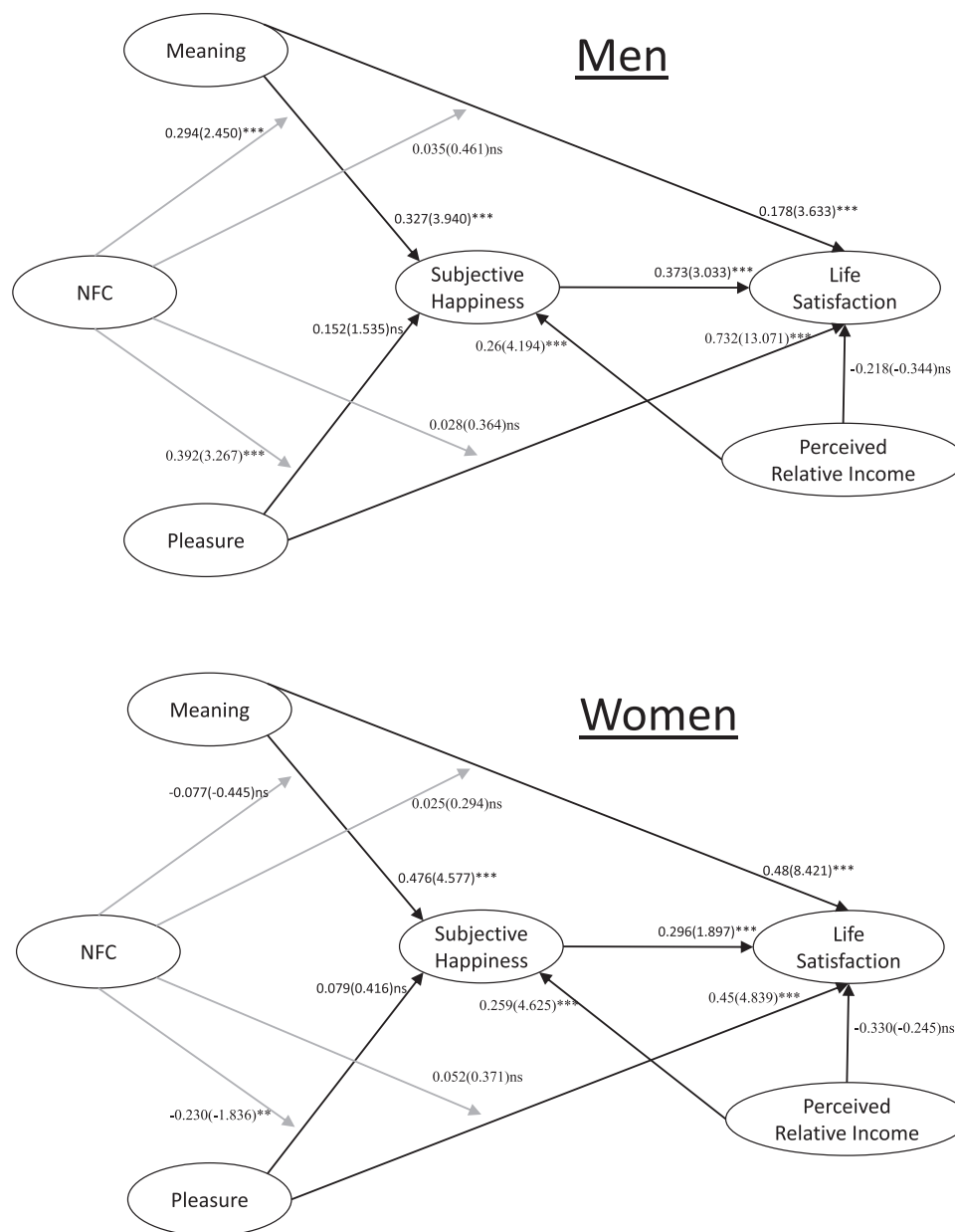


FIGURE 2 Results: Two-group (men vs. women) analysis. NFC,

significant in the male sample ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.01$) and not significant in the female sample ($\beta = -0.077$, NS). This difference between the two groups is itself significant (the difference in $\chi^2(16)$ between the groups is 8.66, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H6 is supported; NFC strengthens the positive relationship between meaningful consumption and subjective happiness for men, but not for women.

The interaction between the NFC and pleasure is also not significant in aggregate sample ($\beta = 0.129$, NS), but this interaction is positive and significant in the male sample ($\beta = 0.329$, $p < 0.01$) and negative and significant in the female sample ($\beta = -0.230$, $p < 0.05$). Again, this difference between the two groups is significant (the difference in $\chi^2(16)$ between the groups is 7.78, $p < 0.01$). So, not only

does the NFC weaken the positive relationship between the pleasurable consumption and the subjective happiness for women, but it also strengthens this relationship for men. H7 is therefore supported too.

Two other significant results that were not predicted formally are worth mentioning. First, NFC positively affects men's happiness derived from pleasurable consumption; that is, NFC and pleasure positively interact in predicting happiness in men's sample ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, pleasure matters for in-the-moment happiness of high NFC men but not for low NFC men. Second, perceived relative income is positively related to subjective happiness ($\beta = 0.275$, $p < 0.01$), but it is not to life satisfaction.

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

4.1 | Theoretical implications

The empirical study and structural analysis strongly support the offered conceptualization on the important role of gender in consumption of experiences affecting consumer happiness. Men seem to derive more happiness and satisfaction with life from pleasurable experiences than women, while women derive more happiness and satisfaction with life from personally fulfilling (or meaningful) experiences than men.

Our results thus support the notion that pleasure and meaning are separate dimensions that matter greatly when consumers assess how happy and satisfied they are with life as part of a variety of consumed experiences. This study finds that personal fulfillment (or meaning) as an experience evoked by consumption directly and positively affects subjective happiness and life satisfaction. However, while pleasure also directly affects life satisfaction, it does not influence immediate subjective happiness. It is possible that the evoked pleasure may be detrimental to subjective happiness because consumption for pleasure may be seen as frivolous, resulting in guilt (Boujbel & d'Astous, 2015; Lasco, 1991). In our sample of Western consumers, this effect holds not only for women, but also for men. In Western, gender-equal societies consuming for pleasure may generally trigger negative materialistic stereotypes (Kilbourne & LaForge, 2010), and therefore attenuate the positive effect of pleasure on subjective happiness.

However, when consumers change the time perspective and assess their life satisfaction—rather than the immediate post-consumption happiness—they seem to see the positive role that pleasure has for their life satisfaction. The shift in the perspective may enable them to think in more abstract terms (Trope & Liberman, 2010), and to think positively about the role pleasure has in their lives.

As predicted, NFC moderates the impact of pleasure and meaning on subjective happiness differently for men and women. Men who have high NFC and who therefore structure and meaningfully reason about the situations in which they find themselves can derive more happiness from meaningful consumption than men who have low NFC. Analogously, women who have high NFC get less happiness from pleasurable consumption than women who have low NFC. These results empirically confirm the speculations made by Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) about the NFC as a key predictor of gender-specific information processing strategies.

Perceived relative income positively affects short-term happiness, but not life satisfaction. Again, this result may be a consequence of the shift from a short- to a long-term assessment (see above) and may explain the inconsistencies in the existing research on income and happiness. When one thinks abstractly, life seems to be not only about money. Also, what matters in the relation between perceived relative income and happiness is not the absolute amount of money one makes, but the relative or subjective amount (i.e., as *perceived* in comparison to others).

Does “nature” or “nurture” explain the relationship between gender and happiness? When it comes to any gender differences,

there are always two “end-point” explanations on a continuum of possible explanations: they may be evolutionarily determined (i.e., innate) or they may be socio-culturally determined. So, do women seek happiness and life satisfaction from meaningful experiences more than men, and do men seek happiness and life satisfaction from pleasurable experiences more than women because this is just a reflection of intrinsic predispositions or are these examples of “learned” gendered behaviors?

A possible explanation for the observed differences is that these they are a result of socialization. Social structures, institutions, and the different societal roles that women and men have traditionally held contribute to differences in behavior of the two genders. To a large extent, how women and men regard themselves has been shaped by cognitions attained in childhood and marked by then-current socio-culturally constructed exemplary “female” and “male” behaviors (Bem, 1974). Consequently, it is possible women caring on average more about personal fulfillment than men, and men more about pleasure than women, are examples of such “nurtured” behaviors.

In contrast to sociocultural explanations of consumer behavior, evolutionary theory (“nature”) suggests that if a specific behavior is stable across societies, it is probably evolutionarily determined (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005). Applied to the current study, if we were to find out that meaning and pleasure have a differential impact on female and male happiness and life satisfaction, and this distinction is stable across different cultures, it would be more probable that such differences were innate rather than socio-culturally constructed. We do not have cross-cultural data, however, to test this proposition. Still, and notwithstanding that our hypothesis linking pleasure and subjective happiness for the two genders (H4a) was not supported, some secondary evidence shows that the differential influences of meaning and of pleasure on happiness and life satisfaction of the two genders are more likely to be socio-culturally constructed than innate. We offer three reasons for this conjecture.

First, in contemporary Western societies, professional women still must negotiate their lives between their professional and family roles (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Professional working mothers engage in the culturally prominent lifestyle known as “juggling” (Thompson, 1996). Because of juggling (and the lack of “me” time), consumed experiences hold specific meanings for working women. Jugglers “have been socialized in a common system of conflicting cultural ideals, beliefs, and gender ideologies” in a search for “meanings that arise in relation to [their] salient life concerns and their sense of personal history” (Thompson, 1996, p. 388). If this is the case, it could be that women, on average, prioritize personal fulfillment (i.e., meaning) more than men when consuming experiences. It could also be the case that daughters acquire this inclination from their mothers in childhood. Note that the gender differences in few aspects of psychological well-being that Roothman et al. (2003) observe are also in line with gender stereotypes and traditional socialization practices. Moreover, judging by the weak relation of pleasure and happiness for both genders in our sample, it could be the case than men in contemporary, increasingly gender equal Western societies are also socio-culturally conditioned to “neglect” pleasure. This

conjecture is consistent with Eagly and Wood's (1999) convergence hypothesis. Applied to happiness and well-being, this predicts that men and women should become more similar in what makes them happy and increases their life satisfaction as traditional gender-based divisions in wage labor and domestic labor disappear. Contemporary Western men, like contemporary Western women, increasingly suffer from "juggling" lifestyle and an inability to "stop and smell the roses."

Second, according to Baumeister et al. (2013), pleasure—as a balance of affect between pleasure and pain—is rooted in nature, whereas meaning is cultural. Evaluating the meaningfulness of an experience requires consumers to interpret culturally transmitted symbols to be able to assess the experience in relation to values and other meanings that also are learned from the culture (Baumeister et al., 2013).

Finally, our results echo the findings of Dennis et al. (2018) who studied gendered shopping styles. Note that shopping is an experience that our respondents listed (see Table 2). Dennis et al. show that women, when they shop, like the company of fellow shoppers and enjoy shopping as a social experience. Men, however, shop quickly. They prefer to shop alone because that makes shopping efficient and gets the job done. Importantly, women in our sample, in contrast to men, are more likely to recall communal than solitary experiences.

4.2 | Managerial implications

The results of the present study are managerially relevant because they offer clues for creation and structuring of commercial experiences that would appeal to both genders. Consistent with the results of the present study, we argue that, to make customers happy, companies must be able to deliver predominantly meaningful experiences. Considering that women and men represent two very large segments, many companies cannot pick and choose between the two segments because this would mean a considerable loss of revenue. When they market an experience, companies must make sure that they offer cues and specific services that trigger personal fulfillment on their own. At the same time, it would be a good idea if companies also engage consumers' creativity and a sense of escapism to help consumers avoid overthinking the experience enabling them to momentarily "get lost" in it. To be sure, companies do these things. So, for every "chillaxing," pleasurable moment of lounging at the pool or drinking champagne or eating delicacies at an opulent buffet, cruise companies, for example, also offer yoga, "self-discovery" meditation, unforgettable sunsets, and opportunities for self-growth by visiting historic sights and learning about them. In a way, the goal of companies is to make the experience they offer extraordinary. This recommendation is also consistent with the finding that what makes an experience extraordinary is its meaningfulness (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014).

Ads that promote experiences often utilize the idea that experiences give meaning and pleasure to customers. Going back to the cruise example, the imagery used in cruise ads shows small, pleasurable (consumption) moments (e.g., sunbathing, swimming in a massive pool, closeups of flowing champagne), but it often makes a point that cruise customers are also going through a meaningful, even transformative experience. Hence, sunsets on cruise ships are always

enjoyed with a romantic partner, dancing classes taken during the cruise always make people younger, yoga classes make them forget about everyday responsibilities, and trips are always best enjoyed with children (if the ad is targeted at families). All these moments can be interpreted as personally fulfilling and meaningful.

Note that commercial experiences inevitably involve brands. A commercial experience that is meaningful and pleasurable may associatively boost meaning and pleasure of the brands that are part of the experience, increasing the overall brand happiness. Brand happiness, in turn, will positively affect brand-rated outcomes (e.g., repurchase intentions, willingness to pay premium, and spread word-of-mouth) (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018).

Finally, our results hint at the possibility that consumption of experiences, including brands in the experiences, may have a positive effect on consumers' long-term well-being, a finding echoed by Schmitt et al. (2015).

4.3 | Future research

While the results of this study largely confirm the predictions about how consumption of experiences influences the pleasure and the personal fulfillment of female and male consumers, future research should further explore the reasons as to why women and men pursue happiness differently. For example, in their study of how individuals pursue happiness in general, Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) show that women typically boost their happiness by engaging in activities that require social interaction—maintaining relationships, helping others, going to movies *with others*, engaging in religious activities—and by pursuing career goals, attempting to reach full potential, or organizing life. Men, however, report that they are more likely to seek happiness through solitary activities such as working on hobbies, exercising, going to movies *alone*, and being absorbed in tasks that they enjoy doing. These findings are not only consistent with the evidence showing that women typically adopt an interdependent self-view whereas men adopt an independent self-view (Lin & Raghuram, 2005), they are also consistent with our results. It could be the case that the happiness-pursuing activities that Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) identify as male-specific are more pleasurable whereas those that are female-specific are more meaningful. Future research should investigate if this is the case.

Future research should also look more closely at how NFC influences the pursuit of happiness of male consumers. This study did not predict that NFC would affect the relation between pleasure and happiness for men. Yet, when their NFC is high, men realize that pleasure matters for their in-the-moment happiness. Interestingly, NFC is positively correlated with masculine sex-role attitudes, perhaps because of the stereotype of men being rational (Osberg, 1987). At the same time, low NFC men seem to be more sensitive to hedonic information than high NFC men. It could be that a type of licensing effect operates here (Fitzsimons et al., 2007)—men's willingness to elaborate more about what makes them happy may give them a license to acknowledge that they care about pleasure. Therefore, men may not admit explicitly that pleasure equals

happiness, but it is the men with high NFC who admit this more readily than men with low NFC. This result could be also context-specific—high NFC men admit the importance of pleasure in their pursuit of happiness because seeking happiness is a positive endeavor, unlike the prototypical “vice” behaviors that Fitzsimons et al. (2007) studied. More research is needed to resolve this issue.

In studying how gender influences consumption, researchers have drawn on Judith Butler's (1990) conceptualization that gender is something performed rather than possessed as an innate quality. In that sense, the fact that women care relatively more about personal fulfillment and men relatively more about pleasure in their respective pursuits of happiness could reflect the myths of femininity—women are self-sacrificing, modest, passive (Goulding & Saren, 2009)—, which perpetuate the socio-culturally constructed patriarchal order and which, in turn, could affect gendered happiness-pursuing strategies. On the other hand, women and men could be evolutionarily predisposed to seek happiness in different ways. To address this possibility, future research should attempt to replicate this study in different cultures and see if the results are consistent across the cultures.

When considering a possible influence of consumer age on the relationship between gender and happiness, our sample, due to its size and composition, cannot do justice to this question. Older people associate happiness with peacefulness, whereas younger people associate it with excitement (Mogilner et al., 2011). Could it be that peacefulness is related to meaning and excitement to pleasure? Future research can resolve this conundrum.

Finally, future research should shed more light on how income, subjective as well as objective, further moderates the relationship between gender and happiness. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) offer some preliminary evidence demonstrating that (objectively) richer people get more happiness from experiential purchases than from material purchases. Following up on our theory, it could be that women, still more than men, focus on meaning in their pursuit of happiness because they are more likely to economize between different consumption domains neglecting “frivolous” pleasure. Hence, it could be that a lack of material resources makes all consumers more women-like, conditioning them to look for meaning while avoiding “unnecessary” material pleasures. It could also be the case that more expensive experiences are more meaningful.

In conclusion, future consumer research should continue to treat happiness as being triggered in two different ways, as it was done here. This will provide a more nuanced picture of consumer happiness compared to the more general psychological research conducted before.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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