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COMPENSATORY CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER COMPROMISES: A STATE OF THE ART REVIEW

Dr. Bernadett Koles *(First and Corresponding author)*
Senior Research Fellow
Business Research Unit
ISCTE Business School – University Institute of Lisbon
Avenida Forças Armadas
Lisbon, 1649-026, Portugal
Tel: +351 925 656161
Email: Bernadett.Koles@iscte.pt

Dr. Victoria Wells *(Second author)*
Professor of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour
Sheffield University Management School
The University of Sheffield
Conduit Road, Sheffield, S10 1FL, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 114 222 3271
Email: victoria.wells@sheffield.ac.uk

Dr. Mark Tadajewski *(Third author)*
Professor of Marketing
Durham University Business School
Queen's Campus, University Boulevard, Thornaby
Stockton on Tees, TS17 6BH, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 191 334 9426
Email: mark.tadajewski@durham.ac.uk

Biographical Details:

Bernadett is a Research Fellow at ISCTE University Business School, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Marketing at Durham University.

Victoria is Professor in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Sheffield University Management School.

Mark is Professor of Marketing at Durham University.

Abstract

Compensatory consumption has been an increasingly researched yet widely debated area of consumer behaviour over the last 20 years. Extant research formulates the term as overwhelmingly negative, largely due to the simplistic and fragmented conceptualisations assumed in prior work. The purpose of the current paper is to present a comprehensive review of the umbrella term of compensatory consumption, incorporating a continuum of behaviours and accounting for the pre- and post-consumption periods including both positive and negative viewpoints. In addition, expanding upon the theory of need satisfaction, the current paper introduces a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. Finally, a proposed theoretical framework is presented that differentiates between compensatory and compromisory consumption based on the extent of consumer consciousness, rationality and rationalisation. Future research directions are offered.

Summary statement of contribution:

Via incorporating a continuum of compensatory behaviours, accounting for pre- and post-consumption periods, and introducing a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise, our framework addresses on-going debates in the field of consumer research, deepens our conceptual understanding of this important yet still under researched area, and overall compliments the available literature in a substantive fashion.

Keywords

Compensatory consumption, compensation, compromise, rationalisation, consumption continuum, consumer consciousness.

Introduction

Material goods and services serve important purposes in our everyday lives (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995), enable us to differentiate ourselves from others (Goffman, 1959; Kassarjian, 1971; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009), to accentuate our creative potential (Eccles, Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2006), to construct and extend our sense of self (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Carr & Vignoles, 2011; Mittal, 2006; Schembri, Merrilees & Kristiansen, 2010), and even to experience flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Woodruffe- Burton, Eccles & Elliott, 2002). Given their symbolic meaning, products play a substantial role in the formation, maintenance and communication of identity (Dittmar, 2011; Elliott, 1998; Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Oyserman, 2009; Shankar, Elliott & Fitchett, 2009), encouraging consumers to select objects that are meaningful for them (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Ferraro, Kirmani & Matherly, 2013).

This dynamic interaction between individuals and products has contributed to the expansion of consumer research, moving beyond assumptions of rationality (Ajzen, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Phillips, Olson & Baumgartner, 1995), as it became increasingly clear that individuals are often irrational, unpredictable, and driven by emotions, unconscious impulses, and hedonic triggers (Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994; Markin, 1979). Beginning in the early 1930s, there was an observable shift in thinking about the marketing of consumer goods which entailed placing an increasing emphasis on the consumer and their needs and wants. Moreover, it was acknowledged that much consumption is not urgent, is optional, and postponable (Tosdal, 1933).

Reflecting a more widespread appreciation for these and related issues, scholars now stress the importance of emotional, experiential and non-conscious mechanisms in structuring decision-making and behaviour (Bargh, 2002; Henning, Hennig-Thurau & Feiereisen, 2012). They pay increased attention to consumer characteristics and attest to the diverse ways in which people engage with a varied range of product categories. Specifically, an increasing body of work has emerged documenting the influence of psychological and personal attributes on consumption, including stable and enduring features as well as those which are transient and situational (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014; Antonetti & Baines, 2014; Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009). Additionally, the overall categorisation of products has become more elaborate and it is now common to distinguish between utilitarian goods that fulfil tangible, practical and non-sensory needs, and hedonic items that address fantasy, enjoyment and provide experiential benefits (Chitturi, Raghunathan & Mahajan, 2008; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

Our understanding of consumption behaviour has, as the foregoing section indicates, taken leaps and strides. Untangling the thicket of this literature is still extremely challenging especially in relation to compensatory consumption (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), the focus of this paper. Synthesizing earlier definitions (Gronmo, 1988; Kang, 2009; Kim & Gal, 2014; Rucker & Galinsky, 2013; Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), compensatory consumption refers to the focus upon, deliberation about, acquisition and use of products in response to a deficit triggered by *perceived* needs and desires that cannot be fulfilled directly. As a form of compensation, they are fulfilled through an alternative means. The umbrella term of compensatory consumption captures a wide range of aspects, including retail therapy (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996; Kang, 2009), compulsive shopping (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), impulsive buying (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998), hedonistic shopping (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013), conspicuous consumption (Chaudhuri, Mazumdar & Ghoshal, 2011), and compensatory eating (Grunert, 1994). Reading across this scholarship, there is a core narrative thread: behaviours tend to occur in response to a precursor like low self-esteem (Gronmo, 1988), difficult or stressful situations (Andreasen, 1984; Ruvio, Somer & Rindfleisch, 2014; van Kempen, 2007) and more prosaically, boredom (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998).

Many of us are probably able to recall having engaged in compensatory practices. We may turn to treats like chocolate when we are sad or disappointed or reward ourselves with something special because we got the job we really wanted. Surprisingly, despite the everyday and commonplace nature of compensatory consumption, conceptual and empirical work dealing with it remains underdeveloped (Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim & Rucker, 2015; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005). Moreover, it is fair to say that existing conceptualisations of compensatory practices remain fragmented and are distributed across a wide range of literatures. As such, a structured review will provide a synoptic framing of these core concerns across the scholarly tableaux, enabling researchers to determine appropriate gaps, areas for problematisation and productive empirical investigation.

With this in mind, we provide a comprehensive review of compensatory consumption. We incorporate antecedents, behavioural manifestations and consequences and our review accounts for negative and positive forms of consumption. Challenging a number of core assumptions, our narrative outlines alternative and complimentary frameworks. Specifically, and importantly, we distinguish between compensation and compromise. Finally, our paper concludes by making recommendations for future research.

Compensatory Consumption – Theoretical foundations and key concepts

Compensatory consumption is an umbrella term that captures consumer intentions and behavioural responses triggered by perceived deficits, needs and desires that cannot be fulfilled directly. Reflecting this, they are compensated for via alternative means. Compensatory practices are typically a reaction to a discrepancy or incongruence between individuals' ideal and actual self-views (Gould, 1993). This divergence stimulates discomfort which is addressed via consumption (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim & Rucker, 2015; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005). To address states of self-incongruence, people often seek and acquire relevant products, services and means that symbolise accomplishment. Consumers may increase their overall levels of consumption (Hoegg, Scott, Morales & Dahl, 2014); they might spend more money on self-affirming goods (Echo Wen, Vohs & Chen, 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim & Rucker, 2015); or consume products that signal desirable traits (Rucker, Levav & Lisjak, 2014), projecting a concern with self-improvement (Allard & White, 2015), power and status (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; van Kempen, 2007) or masculinity (Moisio, 2007) to their intended audience. Mandel, Rucker, Levav and Galinsky (2017) propose five distinct behavioural strategies to reduce or offset self-discrepancy. These include direct resolution that targets the actual source; symbolic self-completion that signals mastery in the particular domain; dissociation that distances the individual from discrepancy-relevant products and services; escapism that distracts the individual from thoughts related to the self-discrepancy, and fluid compensation that reinforces other identity aspects that are unrelated to the self-discrepancy.

Theoretically and conceptually, the issue of compensation is indebted to Adler (Adler, 1970). Adler underscored the importance of compensation in addressing perceived inferiorities such as lack of power and self-esteem (Vaughan, 1927). Adler (1916) asserts that all psychological phenomena commence with a feeling of inferiority that propels the person to move upward and overcome unpleasant sensations. For instance, an unathletic child may focus on their academic labours thereby gaining scholarly recognition as a compensation for their athletic limitations (Gronmo, 1988).

Since Adler's time, the notion of compensation has diffused across multiple disciplines, eventually influencing consumer behaviour. The term compensatory consumption was first coined in the 1960s, emerging from field research among low-income families in the United States (Caplovitz, 1963). However, the idea that consumption is influenced by non-rational forces has much earlier genealogical precedents (Mitchell, 1912; Thorndike, 1940; Veblen, 1899). Nonetheless, the 1950s witnessed a major turning point with much greater emphasis on experiential, emotional and non-utilitarian aspects of consumption (Kassarjian, 1971). This, of course, was the period during which motivation research garnered academic and practitioner interest (Tadajewski, 2006). As part of closer connections between psychologists,

anthropologists, sociologists and marketing professionals and consultants, the lexicon of desire, motivation, persuasion and symbolism were increasingly invoked when speaking about Mr and Mrs Consumer (Levy, 1959). Within these debates, there was a limited amount of attention given to people who were structurally marginalised in society. These groups, it was realised, sought to generate the respect they were denied in the world of work (perhaps even by being outside traditional forms of employment) through their consumption habits. In other words, product symbolism was their compensation for unattainable social and professional advancement (Caplovitz, 1963).

Alongside the theoretical evolution of consumer behaviour, empirical studies on compensatory consumption received some attention, particularly in the later 1980s. Gronmo (1988), most notably, took a sociological lens to compensatory consumption. He argued that people are not necessarily consistent and predictable. They often try to satisfy needs for esteem and self-actualisation. As part of this, they compensate for any deficiencies in their lives. But, these behaviours do not tackle the core problem directly. Rather they enable individuals to relieve their discomfort by reverting to alternatives (Kang, 2009).

Building on this brief foray into the conceptual foundations of compensatory consumption, we will now turn to examine empirically based compensatory consumption research.

Empirical research on compensatory consumption

An extensive search capturing the past 20 years of research on compensatory consumption was undertaken, using terms such as 'compensation' and 'compensatory consumption' in the most commonly used academic databases (including EBSCO, Google Scholar and JSTOR). To focus our initial efforts, a literature search was conducted that targeted prior empirical and data driven work (as opposed to purely theoretical pieces), with the resulting set of studies (n=26) shown in Table 1. Only those studies that made *direct* reference to compensatory consumption within marketing and consumer behaviour will be considered here[1]. Broader literature beyond the focal concept is explored later.

[1] In the case of Mazzocco et al. (2012), the focus is more on conspicuous consumption. Given that they used the term interchangeably with compensatory consumption, it is retained here.

TABLE 1. Chronological review of empirical studies investigating compensatory consumption.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Abdalla et al. (2016)	Develop a framework that integrates extended and expanded self theories with compensatory consumption as a background.	International Business Review	Primary: interviews & group discussions. Secondary data: Secondary: Assessment of media & interviews with key	Brazil-based; Young adults (8); Songs (14)	Found meaningful relations between identity building and consumption. The 'expanded self' category contained admiration, fame and envy relations among the lead figures, while the 'extended self' category included the role of the consumption of objects, brands and places in the transmission of identity aspects.
Lisjak et al. (2015)	Explore the relationship between self-regulation and within domain compensation.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 3 lab experiments	US-based; College students (1) n=173; (2) n=127 (3a) n=118; (3b) n=123	Although within-domain compensation can serve as a psychological remedy to repair the self, results indicate that it can also have negative effects. More specifically, the current research shows that engaging in within-domain compensation can trigger ruminative thinking about the threat, which in turn can undermine performance in subsequent tasks that require self-regulation; including behaviours ranging from resisting temptations by unhealthy food to performing on cognitively complex tasks.
Allard and White (2015)	Examines the notion that guilt leads to preferences for self-improvement products	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 5 lab experiments	Canada-based; College students n=97	Only feelings of guilt was found to have a unique motivation consequence that activates a desire for self-improvement and is linked with a general preference for self-improvement product choices. These findings only held in scenarios when purchasing was intended for the self as opposed to for others. Although the research does not address compensatory consumption per se, it has useful implications for this body of work.
Hoegg et al. (2014)	Examine ways in which consumers respond to and compensate for larger than expected clothing sizes.	Journal of Consumer Psychology	Mixed methods (1), (2) & (5) experiment; (3) & (4) online panel.	US-based; Female participants (1) n=119 college students; (2) n= 42 adults in weight loss program; (3) n=169 MTurk; (4) n=91 MTurk; (5) n=229 college students.	The findings suggest that larger clothing size results in more negative evaluations of the merchandise, but can also lead to compensatory consumption of other appearance enhancing but mostly non-sized products. In other words, despite expectations, instead of lowering purchase intent, larger sizes can actually increase spending, as consumer engage in compensatory consumption to help repair their damaged self-esteem.
Kim and Gal (2014)	Investigate compensatory as opposed to adaptive consumption as a function of self-acceptance.	Journal of Consumer Research	Mixed methods (1) & (3) experiment; (2) Online panel.	US-based (1) n=291 MTurk; (2a) n = 168 college students; (2b) n = 239 college students; (3a) n=96 MTurk; (3b) n=139 MTurk.	Identified self-acceptance as a moderator for engagement in compensatory as opposed to adaptive consumption in response to self-deficit information via changing the appraisal of the self-deficit from harmful to benign to self-worth.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Coleman and Williams (2014)	Explore individuals' response to emotions that is inconsistent with their greater emotional profile.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Specifics unreported	Specifics unreported	Emotions that are inconsistent with people's salient social identity can undermine their identity enactment and thus pose a threat. In response, individuals show preference for products that boost that identity, relative to others that are consistent with their emotional profile.
Echo Wen et al. (2014a)	Study people's responses to situations when they feel socially excluded.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 5 experiments	(1), (2), (3) & (5) specifics unreported; (4) US-based MTurk	First, social exclusion was shown to trigger a loss of personal control and motivate people to save money as a means to regain control; with money representing personal control. Second, social exclusion increased spending on products that helped achieve social affiliation; with money being a means for acquiring social affiliation through products.
Echo Wen et al. (2014b)	Study consumers' choice of products in situations when they feel socially excluded as opposed to socially included.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 3 experiments	Beijing & Hong Kong; College students; (1) n=118 Beijing; (2) n = 101 Hong Kong; (3) n = 186 Beijing	After experiencing social exclusion, consumers tend to favour products to differentiate themselves and accentuate their uniqueness. This is particularly the case when they are manipulated to believe that their personality traits are stable as opposed to unstable, and when their self-views have been previously enhanced through self-affirmation.
Rucker et al. (2014)	Examine factors that influence how people compensate for threat.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 experiments	Specifics unreported	In situations when people are motivated to self-signal their self-worth following a threat, they prefer products that boost the self in the domain of the threat. In contrast, when people are motivated to signal their self-worth to others, they focus on their strengths and prefer products that boost the self in domains unrelated to the threat.
Stuppy et al. (2014)	Study whether or not the psychological experience of physical shortness increases compensatory consumption.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 lab experiments	Specifics unreported	Physical shortness increased compensatory consumption via posing a threat to identity and social status. People who feel chronically or temporarily short (vs. tall) show a preference for products high in status. Importantly, *feeling* short was found to affect status-seeking behaviours above and beyond *being* short, with compensatory strategies providing less socially harmful buffers against the threat than more permanent and detrimental life outcomes.
Bian et al. (2014)	Extend the literature on power via identifying boundary conditions mitigating the relationship between social power and compensatory consumption	British Journal of Social Psychology	Set of 3 experiments	UK-based; College students; (1) n=80; (2) n=60; (3) n=187	Social power states appear to affect the consumption of luxury brand counterfeit products (LBCP). In particular, the relationship between social power and LBCP consumption was moderated by product conspicuousness. High power states were more likely to trigger consumption of highly conspicuous LBPC items. Purchase propensity for less conspicuous LBPC was constant regardless of power levels.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Kim and Rucker (2012)	Explore proactive versus reactive compensatory consumption.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 5 lab experiments	US-based; College students (1) n=153; (2) n=185; (3) n=113; (4) n=164; (5) n=84	Proactive compensatory consumption was engaged in to protect the self from an anticipated threat, while reactive compensatory consumption was employed for purposes of distraction. In other words, consumers can use products in a proactive manner to infuse the self with an additional layer of protection in anticipation of self-threats, which in turn minimises their negative impact once realised.
Ruvio and Dubois (2012)	Examine powerlessness-induced compensatory consumption of experiential vs. material purchases.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 2 online experiments	US-based; College students; (1) n=164; (2) n=128	Powerless consumers paid more for high status luxury products overall, and indicated a higher preference for experiential purchases over material ones. Hence, experiential purchases seem to have a greater compensatory power over material ones; at least in the case of powerless consumers.
Mazzocco et al. (2012)	Examine the impact of direct and vicarious identification with a low-status group on consumers' desire for status related objects	Journal of Consumer Psychology	Set of 4 experiments	US-based; Online College students & adults (1) n=146; (2) n=117; (3) n=50; (4) n=69;	Conspicuous consumption desires were stronger for Blacks than Whites, particularly those who highly identified with their racial group. Vicarious identification with a low-status racial outgroup led Whites to desire status related products. The vicarious and temporary identification with a low-status outgroup is found sufficient to elicit conspicuous consumption desires.
Gaviria and Bluemelhuber (2010)	Investigate compensatory consumption when saying goodbye to familiar things and facing the loss of familiar contexts.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Grounded theory method; Case studies based on written and story telling exercises	US-based; Individuals with significant losses in their lives; n=10	Identified two groups of consumption strategies employed by individuals when faced with the loss of familiar contexts. On the one hand, they talk about the 'Teddy Bear Effect', referring to a coercive force that aims at preserving a past that may otherwise be forgotten. On the other hand, they mention the 'Rebound Effect' in regards to those situations where integrative concepts and multiple alternative action plans are needed in order to achieve future goals.
Dalton (2009)	Illustrate that threat to consumers' self-worth leads to compensation by choosing products that allow for self-expression.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 lab experiments	US-based; College students	A threat to one's self-worth increased consumers' propensity to trade up and choose the higher priced option in a choice between two options; but only when the decision to trade up occurred in a highly self-relevant domain. In less self-relevant domains, consumers showed a reduced propensity to trade up. Furthermore, buffering participants prior to the threat reduces their tendency to trade up in self-relevant products.
Gao et al. (2009)	Examine people's reactions and product selection following a momentarily lowered self-confidence in a given self-view; with as well as without prior direct or indirect bolstering to their self-views.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 4 lab experiments	Specifics unreported	Simple manipulations used to threaten consumer's confidence can have a significant impact on their subsequent choice of products in that they tend to seek those that will offset the characteristic of which there is doubt. Once customer's self-views are threatened by doubt, they are more likely to choose consumer products that display these characteristics. Such threats can be prevented via direct or indirect methods that bolster the self-concept.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Rucker and Galinsky (2009)	Explore consumers' compensatory tendencies in response to threats to their power.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 lab experiments	Specifics unreported	Evidence is found to support both compensatory and non-compensatory processes in consumer behaviour. Psychological states of powerlessness foster a desire to compensate for the loss of power, as manifested in a tendency to focus on and prefer products associated with status. In contrast, compared to the powerless, the powerful prefers products with attributes linked with performance.
Rucker and Galinsky (2008)	Examine how power affects consumers' spending propensities.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 3 lab experiments	US-based; College students (1) n=61; (2) n=127; (3) n=65	Low levels of power increased consumers' willingness to pay for auction items but only in the case of status related products.
Yurchisin et al. (2008)	Explore the relationship between life status changes, negative emotional states and compensatory consumption.	College Student Journal	Quantitative surveys (note: compensatory consumption measure not validated)	US-based; College students n=301	Results indicated that students undergoing life status changes are more likely to engage in compensatory consumption when compared to those experiencing negative emotional states. Nonetheless, both the greater degrees of life status changes and the negative emotional states were found to be positively related to compensatory consumption.
van Kempen (2007)	Explore the spending habits of low-income indigenous vs. non-indigenous households.	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Household survey data	Bolivian sample; Low-income households; n=634	Found opposite effect in the propensity for compensatory consumption for socially visible durable goods between the two largest indigenous groups in Bolivia. In other words, instead of merely imitating the dominant culture, Bolivian indigenous groups appeared to seek higher status primarily within the group's own traditional prestige system.
Moisio (2007)	Examine motivations behind men's compensatory consumption.	Dissertation; University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE	Qualitative interviews	US-based; Lower, middle & upper-class males	Results indicate that less affluent males engage in compensatory consumption driven by a desire to reclaim status, whereas more affluent males wish to curb emasculation via DIY home improvement projects.
Garg and Lerner (2006)	Explore how people use compensatory consumption to cope with their affective state.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 2 experiments	Specifics unreported	Via examining the role of individuals' emotional states such as being sad as opposed to being neutral on their subsequent food consumption and choice price for an object. The results suggest that while neutral individuals' choice price goes down after consuming a hedonic product, the opposite is the case for sad individuals.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Woodruffe-Burton and Elliott (2005)	Study compensatory consumption through the experiences of in-depth cases.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Phenomenological interviews	UK-based; Adult females; n=2 Purposive sampling	Via describing their lived experiences and the associated meanings, women weaved together their consumption activities and experiences into a coherent identity narrative.
Woodruffe-Burton (1998)	Explore the role of clothes as compensatory consumption in men's lives through an exploratory study of male fashion addiction.	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	Phenomenological interviews	UK-based; Adult males; n=3 Purposive sampling	Demonstrated the subjects' consumption of fashion and shopping behaviour frequently to be compensatory in nature.
Woodruffe (1997)	Examine the role of compensatory consumption in women's lives.	Marketing Intelligence and Planning	Phenomenological interviews	UK-based; Adult females; n=3 Purposive sampling	Identified common trends on the basis of the three interviews in the women's engagement in compensatory consumption behaviours.

Examining this literature, it becomes obvious that certain methodological approaches, sampling considerations and comparable overall conceptualisations of compensatory consumption have been utilised.

The first and larger group employs experiments that (usually) sample North American college students (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo & Rucker, 2015; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Yurchisin, Yan, Watchravesringkan & Chen, 2008) or draw from US-panel data (Hoegg, Scott, Morales & Dahl, 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014). The core argument is that compensatory consumption is a response to threats to the self. These might be physical (i.e. height or body size) or emotional (i.e. feeling sad), individual (i.e. in relation to power or control) or social (i.e. social exclusion). They can be real (existing) or hypothetical (i.e. induced in a lab setting). In this literature tranche, compensatory consumption is depicted in negative terms. It is something to be avoided and discouraged. As part of this, these researchers offered effectively a pro-social message, helping people to avoid the behaviours they seek to discourage. Buffering modifications prior to the exposure to threat, including self-acceptance and boosts to self-esteem can buttress confidence to minimise compensatory engagements (Kim & Gal, 2014). It is important to note that these studies assume consumers engage in a cognitive elaboration of their situation and options; a point that will be revisited in later sections of this paper.

The second tranche examines compensatory consumption from a phenomenological and experiential perspective. Reflecting these paradigmatic commitments, interviews and case studies are often the order of the day. Sampling is more diverse. US, UK and Brazilian populations form the core of the samples (Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016; Moisio, 2007; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005). As is common in phenomenological studies, scholars elicit personally meaningful stories and individual narratives from respondents to help them understand the enactment of compensation within the specific context experienced by the consumer. These qualitative studies emphasise the processual nature of compensatory consumption. This is a marked contrast to the idea that it is a single act or behavioural response as is more common in laboratory research. Reflecting the ontological assumptions embodied in interpretive consumer research (i.e. ontological plurality and social construction), compensatory consumption is articulated as a constellation of practices and includes a variety of different behavioural outcomes and positive as well as negative consequences.

Reading across both streams of literature, there are issues that indicate avenues for further study and investigation. First, while some of the research strives to engage with the processual nature of compensatory consumption, the vast majority of empirical work continues to focus on acquisition (i.e. it is a static snapshot). This is a limitation because the pre- and post-

acquisition periods during a compensatory process are often more meaningful for individuals than the single act of purchase (Fournier & Guiry, 1993; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). Naturally, moving beyond the acquisition phase of consumption practice is somewhat difficult to accomplish within a laboratory setting. However, the problems resulting from this focus (i.e. the lack of knowledge we possess about the entire process of compensation) is compounded by the relative paucity of phenomenologically driven inquiry with the consumer on this topic. Such a shift is highly desirable for a simple reason. What might look like negative consequences through the empirical window offered by the unnatural setting of the lab, may not be understood as such by the consumer or when interpreted against the tapestry of their everyday life. To start to emplace these behaviours within the lifeworld – the often complex, nuanced, and multi-faceted lifeworld we all occupy – we necessarily move beyond the conceptualisation and empirical explorations focused only on compensatory consumption in marketing and consumer research, to explore relevant constructs from the distal literature. These include compulsive buying, addictive shopping, impulsive purchases, conspicuous consumption, self-gifting and retail therapy; behaviours which have been linked to consumer compensation yet not always termed compensatory (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998).

Branching out to the distal literature

This part of the review differentiates types of shopping as a function of the frequency of practice and dependency exhibited by individuals; a continuum that was initially explicated by Woodruffe-Burton (1998). It moves from those who pursue mostly utilitarian consumption to people exhibiting addiction-like shopping behaviour. By considering frequency of shopping engagements, we also take into account the enactment, fulfilment and reengagement in compensatory practice and its consequences for the consumer. By going beyond the shopping encounter(s), compensatory consumption is conceptually extended beyond extant literatures.

Starting from the generally perceived negative end of the continuum, *compulsive buying* is a chronic form of compensatory consumption, driven predominantly by recurrent anxieties, prolonged unhappiness, and a perceived sense of deprivation (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Verplanken & Sato, 2011). These behaviours tend to be unplanned, immediate (Rook, 1987), habitual, persistent, and difficult to stop (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014); often resulting in guilt, post-purchase regret, hiding, arguments (Bushra & Bilal, 2014; Horváth, Adigüzel & van Herk, 2013), and leading to various socio-economically and/or psychologically disruptive consequences (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992). The latter includes remorse, financial hardship and strained relationships (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989).

The onset of compulsive buying is usually during adolescence (Black, 2007), often following disruptive experiences (Benmoyal-Bouzaglo & Moschis, 2009). It is prevalent

among young adults (Brougham, Jacobs-Lawson, Hershey & Trujillo, 2011). In a longitudinal study, Brook, Zhang, Brook and Leukefeld (2015) found significant effects of depression, the earlier onset of impulse buying, illicit drug use and symptoms of ADHD on compulsive buying. In comparison to the general population, compulsive buyers tend to exhibit lower self-esteem and self-control, higher levels of anxiety and depression, greater emotional instability and social maladjustment (Achtziger, Hubert, Kenning, Raab & Reisch, 2015; Tommasi & Busonera, 2012), obsessive tendencies (D'Astous, 1990; Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), extreme positive and negative moods (Faber & Christenson, 1996), and tend to be materialistic (Mueller et al., 2011) and narcissistic (Rose, 2007).

Sohn and Choi (2014) in their exploration of the processes underlying compulsive buying identified five sequential steps. It begins with an initially harmless therapeutic encounter aiming to fill a perceived emptiness via shopping. Things soon start to unravel. Denial and ignorance of overconsumption, and a growing appreciation of the severe debt being carried, exacerbates the problem. People are propelled towards increased levels of impulsive purchases. Ultimately, for some, their compulsive buying becomes habitual. It can no longer be escaped or corrected. Compulsive buying tendencies have also been linked with financial attitudes and those engaging in such buying practices tend to undertake less financial planning, possess lower savings, and have a greater preoccupation with money (Spinella, Lester & Bijou, 2014). As we might expect, they are also more likely to misuse available sources of credit (Nor, Ruzita, Che Aniza & Syed, 2014).

Compulsive buying can be differentiated from the milder types of compensatory consumption (such as impulsive buying or self-gifting, which will be discussed below). They occur with higher frequency, and entail more severe consequences (e.g. debt and disruption to everyday functioning) (Lejoyeux, Adès, Tassain & Solomon, 1996). Importantly, the motivations underlying compulsive buying tend to centre around the purchase process as opposed to the gratification derived from possession and ownership (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Compulsive shoppers often return purchased goods (Hassay & Smith, 1996), and they attribute less importance to object attachment (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989) and brand loyalty (Horváth & van Birgelen, 2015).

Addictive consumption – used in a broad sense, rather than in conjunction to the consumption of addictive substances (Alamar & Glantz, 2006) – is linked to compulsive buying. Scholars often use the terms interchangeably (Faber, Christenson, De Zwaan & Mitchell, 1995; Scherhorn, Reisch & Raab, 1990). There are, however, distinguishing features that deserve greater recognition. Compulsive buying tends to entail external pressures that force individuals to act outside of their control and against their will. By contrast, addictive consumption often begins as a normal behaviour that becomes harmful (Grover et al., 2011). An important

differentiating aspect of addictive consumption is that the behaviour is not entirely outside of the individual's conscious reason and control (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996), and addicted consumers represent a more extreme point along the normal consumption continuum (D'Astous, 1990). Consequently, addictive consumption is best described as an addiction because it extends a normal behaviour into a pathological habit, rather than a compulsion that involves unwelcome pressure to do something against one's will (Elliott, 1994; Scherhorn, Reisch & Raab, 1990). Grover et al. (2011) researching the process that takes individuals from benign to excessive consumption, suggest that above and beyond the physical and psychological dispositions central to addiction, environmental triggers are significant. These include social cues and commercial marketing, which accentuate the benefits and downplay the problems associated with excessive consumption.

Stress, anxiety, depression and revenge are commonly cited antecedents associated with addictive consumption (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996). Addictive buyers may have suffered a distortion in their autonomy during their lives (Scherhorn, Reisch & Raab, 1990), with addiction rooted in experiences of limited control and a prolonged lack of power (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996). Similar to compulsive buying, the consequences associated with addictive consumption are mostly negative. But not always. Some positive linkages have been documented. For instance, addictive consumption can repair short-term mood or represent a socially acceptable alternative for other addictive behaviours (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996).

In comparison to the more severe and chronic nature of compulsive buying and addiction, *impulse buying* is assumed to be acute (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), driven by high versus low emotional states (Hirschman & Stern, 1999) and defined as a "sudden, hedonically complex purchase behaviour in which the rapidity of the impulse purchase precludes any…consideration of…implications" (Sharma et al., 2010, p. 277). Impulse buying tends to possess a strongly positive emotional charge (Bashar, Ahmad & Wasiq, 2013). It is often accompanied by low-effort and affective decision-making (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Although this drive may continue for an extended period, impulse purchase tends to be temporary. People will usually become engaged in a cognitive evaluation of the situation, subsequently developing strategies of coping and resistance (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014). So, although impulse buying at high frequencies can reach chronic levels and entail negative consequences, at moderate levels it can be gratifying for the individual (Silvera, Lavack & Kropp, 2008).

While some consider compulsive and impulsive buying tendencies as reflecting a continuum, evidence suggests that they are distinct entities statistically, conceptually and a function of different emotional states (Flight, Rountree & Beatty, 2012). Nor should we consider impulse buying as interchangeable with unplanned purchase (Xiao & Nicholson, 2013). Not all unplanned purchases are impulse buys (Rook, 1987). Unplanned purchases tend to emerge

when the customer is unfamiliar with the store's layout or is under time pressure. Impulse buying, on the other hand, embodies an irresistible urge to spontaneously purchase (Shoham & Brenĉiĉ, 2003).

There are a variety of antecedents at work here. Impulse buying trait or tendency (IBT) is the most prominent (Ozer & Gultekin, 2015), with a number of others forming a matrix of conditions of possibility, with instability, thrill-seeking, susceptibility to influence, an inclination toward quick decision making, shopping enjoyment, extraversion (Badgaiyan & Verma, 2014), and lower levels of self-regulation (Verplanken & Sato, 2011) listed as common facilitators (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014). Impulse buying has also been associated with materialism, with this link further heightened when consumers seek conspicuous goods or those that serve as peer group value statements (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). Women typically score higher on impulsive buying scales compared to men (Segal & Podoshen, 2013; Tifferet & Herstein, 2012). And previous research suggests a positive association between impulsive consumption and disposable income (Bashar, Ahmad & Wasiq, 2013). This implies that impulsive buyers are unlikely to accrue significant debt at least in comparison to their compulsive counterparts.

Situational factors are frequently cited as important antecedents. Interactions between dispositional and situational factors appear to have the largest explanatory power in predicting impulse buying (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014). Positive emotional states (Flight, Rountree & Beatty, 2012), positive social influence (Rook & Fisher, 1995), store environment (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013), promotions (Chen & Wang, 2015), and information overload are common facilitators (Hausman, 2000; Vohs & Faber, 2007). In addition to the facilitating antecedents, psychological traits including price consciousness, self-control and self-monitoring are effective inhibitors (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014).

Motivations for impulse buying tend to differ from compulsive or addictive consumption. Individuals often engage in impulse buying to meet social needs achieved by shopping with friends or interacting with sales staff (Hausman, 2000); hedonic needs addressed by variety seeking (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982); personal needs for fun (Rook, 1987); and self-actualisation needs with the shopping experience conceived as an element of the larger quest of identity affirmation (Hausman, 2000). While the vast majority of consumers report impulse purchase as positive (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014; Flight, Rountree & Beatty, 2012), people may also engage in a form of confession when speaking about their behaviour, which signals a sense of guilt. Consumers often respond to these feelings of remorse by engaging in strategies such as over-buying, hidden ownership, comparative expenditure and self-gifting which enable them to rationalise (in manifold ways) their purchase and limit regret (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998; Chang & Tseng, 2014).

The next widely investigated concept is *conspicuous consumption*. Scholarship in this vein is deeply indebted to Veblen (1899), extending his initial focus on the upper classes and *nouveau riche* to focus on the performance of symbolically conspicuous consumption across all social strata. Given the outward social motivations underlying conspicuous consumption, socially valorised and culturally specific status symbols (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Veblen, 1899) provide a vehicle to mark group affiliation, social position and prestige (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Mugge, Schifferstein & Schoormans, 2006). In his extensive literature review, Mason (1984) suggests that the purchase price is the most significant product attribute for the purely conspicuous consumer, who derives satisfaction not from the product's "value in use but from audience reaction to the wealth displayed" (p. 26).

Conspicuous consumption has been a feature of human practice among a surprisingly wide section of the population since the middle ages (Ladik, Carrillat & Tadajewski, 2015). More recently, the baby boomers were a generative influence in making it a significant middle class phenomenon during the 1980s (Clow & Baack, 2005; Page, 1992; Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Underwriting this was a lay belief in the idea that increased material possessions would elevate social standing and hopefully happiness (Carver & Baird, 1998; Kasser, 2002; Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Beyond the middle classes, recent work finds less affluent individuals and families and those populating emerging economies engaging in conspicuous purchases, especially in terms of seeking luxury products (Charles, Hurst & Roussanov, 2009; Hamilton, 2009; Souiden, M'Saad & Pons, 2011). Psychologically speaking, antecedents include self-esteem, self-image, social status and popularity (Shukla & Sharma, 2009), as well as attachment and parental caring during adolescence (Gudmunson & Beutler, 2012).

Traditionally, conspicuous consumption has centred on luxury goods (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Majic & Majic, 2011), but more recently it has been expanded to cover appeals to reference groups. In this move, debates manifest a shift from materialistic practices to those that can be conspicuous but conspicuous in a non-materialistic sense such as pro-social behaviour (Johnson & Tariq, 2013) or sustainable consumption (Etta, Nai-Chi & Chih Ping, 2008; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014; Prothero et al., 2011). Consumers' personal aspirations tend to play a further role. Intrinsically motivated individuals, that is, those for whom goal attainment provides a source of meaning, enjoyment and satisfaction, are more likely to seek luxury goods for quality-driven purposes and self-directed pleasure. Those with extrinsic aspirations whose primary motivation derives from others' praise and external reward are more likely to pursue luxury merchandise for conspicuous reasons (Truong, 2010). Despite these general categorisations, rather than consistently clinging to one or other forms of motivation, customers frequently find themselves oscillating between the two poles (Ehrnrooth & Gronroos, 2013; Hudders, 2012).

An increasing number of studies explore conspicuous consumption across cultural boundaries and racial and/or religious variations (Mazzocco, Rucker, Galinsky & Anderson, 2012; Podoshen, Andrzejewski & Hunt, 2014). Advancements in people's relative social standing may result, available empirical research suggests, in a gradual shift in their conspicuous consumption motivations. For instance, a study exploring conspicuous behaviours exhibited by affluent black South Africans revealed that while experiences of relative deprivation appeared to influence the initial motivations to catch up to a more privileged – predominantly white – reference group, once accomplished, the motivations tended to shift towards the aim to keep up with affluent members of the black community that represented the participants' own peer group (Chipp, Kleyn & Manzi, 2011).

Next, *self-gifting* as a therapeutic form of compensatory consumption captures rewarding, celebratory and hedonic aspects of consumption (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013; Mortimer, Bougoure & Fazal ‐ E ‐ Hasan, 2015). Mick and Demoss (1990) define self-gifts as "personally symbolic self-communication through special indulgences that tend to be premeditated and highly context bound" (p. 328). In contrast with the other forms of consumption reviewed above, there is an increasing focus on day-to-day image-related products (i.e. clothing and accessories) rather than luxury merchandise (Heath, Tynan & Ennew, 2011). In terms of personal attributes, individuals with more independent self-views tend to approach self-gifting more positively (Weisfeld-Spolter & Thakkar, 2012). Females and those who are not married are more likely to engage in self-gifting without, in the main, subsequent dissonance (Ward & Thuhang, 2007).

Self-gifting is often associated with hedonic and indulgent drivers. Both internal and external motivations are influential, separately as well as in combination. Initial triggers for self-gifting may originate from personal aspirations and self-related purposes. In the case of luxury brands, for example, the act of purchase reflects a social statement with expected social benefits and motives (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2014). While some researchers conclude that self-gifts are intentional and active self-directed acquisitions (Mick & Demoss, 1990), others suggest they are purchased impulsively (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). The ultimate motivations tend to include a desire for enhanced self-esteem and mood repair (Atalay & Meloy, 2006), stress relief or reward, and deservedness (Heath, Tynan & Ennew, 2011). Clearly, post-purchase regret may surface, mostly when following celebratory or therapeutic self-gifting motivations (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013).

An additional category of compensatory consumption that has emerged in recent decades and remains under-explored is retail therapy. As a term, it is used interchangeably with self-gifting. As a practice, it connotes an attempt to alleviate negative mood states that are relatively mild and temporary in nature (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). A point of divergence here is that self-

gifting entails the often premeditated consumption of specific products and services (Mick & Demoss, 1990); retail therapy, on the other hand, is a series of shopping engagements elicited by contexts and situations (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). Nonetheless, research on retail therapy is scarce, but it has secured attention in the popular press and practitioner-oriented outlets (Rick, Pereira & Burson, 2014).

Towards a holistic processual view

In order to increase our understanding of compensatory consumption, it is essential that we organise the antecedents, goals, behavioural manifestations and consequences in a systematic fashion. Table 2 provides a summary capturing the entire consumption cycle. The information presented highlights important trends that have not been previously linked in such a comprehensive fashion. Two important points should be noted. First, "compensatory consumption" is not included as a separate construct. This is consistent with our argument that it reflects a constellation of practices united under an umbrella. Second, we emphasise the unique and distinguishing features that characterise each of the compensatory forms. The sequence of behaviours was determined on the basis of the severity of outcomes and consequences associated with them.

A further differential should be noted. On the one hand, scholars have noted a variety of immediate precursors including situational stimuli like store environment (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013), marketing tools (Weisfeld-Spolter & Thakkar, 2012), product attributes (Hoegg, Scott, Morales & Dahl, 2014) and transient emotional states like sadness (Garg & Lerner, 2006) or self-threat (Dalton, 2009). The role of these antecedents is more easily identifiable in the sense of being a direct trigger in a compensatory episode. Even so, there are various other factors that seem to be important in these consumption practices, yet are much more indirect and more difficult to unravel. Factors like cultural heritage (Podoshen, Lu & Junfeng, 2011), prior history (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996) and enduring dispositional traits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992) play an indirect yet persistent role. As such, a single conglomerate term for antecedents may not capture the complexity and nuanced nature of compensatory consumption. To recognise this variation, a distinction is introduced by using the terms trigger in reference to the former antecedent types and predisposition in reference to the latter ones.

As a final point of clarification, the introduction of motivation and goal attainment is worth a brief mention. Previous research suggests that much of consumer behaviour is goal directed (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2008). Goals have been defined by Austin and Vancouver (1996) as "internal representations of desired states, where states are broadly construed as outcomes, events or processes" (p. 338). Individuals tend to initiate and persist at certain behaviours to the extent that these will lead to desired end states and goal outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the

case of compensatory consumption, goals are important in that they motivate consumers' engagement in specific behaviours, and thus should be accounted for in the overall process.

TABLE 2. Antecedents, goals, behavioural manifestations and consequences underlying compensatory consumption.

		Compulsive behaviours	**Addictive shopping**	**Impulsive buying**	**Conspicuous consumption**	**Self-gifting**
ANTECEDENT	**Predisposition**	*Personality attributes* Low self esteem, low self-control, narcissistic, materialistic and obsessive tendencies *Stable emotional states* - Depression, recurrent anxieties, prolonged unhappiness	*Earlier experiences* - Distortion in autonomy - Prolonged lack of power and control *Demographics* - Socio-economic status	*Personality attributes* - Independent self-view, extraversion, thrill-seeking, materialism, IBT, low self-regulation, shopping enjoyment *Demographics* - Disposable income, gender	*Personality attributes* - Lower self-esteem, self image, adolescent attachment, aspirations *Cultural background*	*Personality attributes* - Independent self view *Demographics* - Gender (females) - Non-married individuals
	Trigger	*Situational / external stimuli* - Reminder of discrepancy - Commercial marketing messages	*Transient emotional states* - Stress, anxiety, depression, need for revenge *Situational stimuli* - Commercial messages	*Transient emotional states* - Exposure to stressful event (e.g. natural disaster) *Situational stimuli* - Store environment - Information overload	*Interpersonal stimuli* - Threats to power, status, group affiliation	*Transient emotional states* - Negative temporary mood - Success and accomplishment
Goals motivating engagement in behaviour		*Personal needs* - Psychological and emotional benefits, appearance enhancement	*Personal needs* - Mood repair	*Combination of needs* - Social interaction, hedonism, psychological lift, identity discovery	*Combination of needs* - To achieve social standing, prestige and position, specific work roles, display wealth and prestige	*Combination of needs* - Hedonic and indulgent drivers, stress relief, reward, socially orientated benefits
Behavioural manifestations		*Cyclical* - Chronic, unplanned, persistent, repetitive, in response to external pressures *Purchase oriented* - Frequent returns	*Cyclical* - Begins as normal behaviour but incrementally disruptive *Purchase oriented* - No interest in ownership	*Independent event* - Result of low effort and affective decision making - Increasingly aware of real need *Product and ownership oriented* - Overwhelming euphoric force from product	*Independent event* - Seeking exclusive and luxury goods *Product and ownership oriented*	*Independent event* - Celebratory, reward, deservedness, immediate gratification *Product and ownership oriented* - Image enhancing products, food
Consequences		*Negative and disruptive* - Personal (guilt, remorse, hiding) - Social / Relational (arguments) - Economical (debt, financial hardship)	*Mixed (positive / negative)* - Short-term mood repair - Alternative to physically more harmful addictions	*Less negative* - Lower financial risk, lower debt - Guilt, hidden ownership, confession, rationalisation *Increasingly positive experiences*	*Mostly positive* - Frequent shift in reference points - Social display	*Mostly positive* - Potential post-purchase regret - Social orientation, sharing

Particularly meaningful trends can be discovered when comparing the left and the right sides of the table, representing more as opposed to less negatively perceived behaviours. While personality attributes like self-esteem (Tommasi & Busonera, 2012) and materialism (Mueller et al., 2011; Shrum et al., 2014) appear across the spectrum, there are unique factors at the endpoints. We find stable emotional states and enduring personal predispositions to dominate the left side of the continuum. These involve on-going emotional deficits including low self-esteem (Gronmo, 1988), recurrent anxieties (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014), depression and prolonged unhappiness (Verplanken & Sato, 2011), narcissism (Rose, 2007), and obsessive tendencies (D'Astous, 1990).

Moving from left to right on the table, situational aspects are increasingly prevalent. There are more outward directed predispositions that entail lasting social deficits, historical experiences and unmet interpersonal needs that are associated with the person's social image and public self. Similarly, the personality attributes are progressively socially oriented towards the positive end of the continuum, capturing variables like extraversion (Badgaiyan & Verma, 2014), self-view (Sharma, Sivakumaran & Marshall, 2014), self-image (Shukla & Sharma, 2009), and personal aspirations (Truong, 2010). External factors such as cultural background (Podoshen, Lu & Junfeng, 2011; Souiden, M'Saad & Pons, 2011), demographics (Segal & Podoshen, 2013), socio-economic status (Gronmo, 1988; Moisio, 2007; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005), affluence and disposable income (Bashar, Ahmad & Wasiq, 2013) also become prevalent.

The second form of antecedents, that is, triggers, represent factors that are more immediate threats to a sense of self (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim & Rucker, 2015), self-confidence (Gao, Wheeler & Shiv, 2009), identity and self-worth (Coleman & Williams, 2014; Dalton, 2009; Kim & Gal, 2014; Stuppy, Paolacci & Ordabayeva, 2014). In contrast to predispositions which reflect more stable and enduring attributes, triggers are shorter term and their impact is chronologically limited. Among these, a variety of positive and negative emotional reactions have been registered, including celebratory and rewarding sensations in response to personal success or accomplishment (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013), insecurity (Rucker, Levav & Lisjak, 2014), sadness (Garg & Lerner, 2013), boredom (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), a desire for fantasy and escapism (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), and other less stable and more temporary emotional deficits (Woodruffe, 1997). Situational variables also prevail. These include exposure to difficult situations, such as breaking up from a romantic relationship or losing a job (Gaviria & Bluemelhuber, 2010), facing significant life status changes and unfamiliar conditions (Yurchisin, Ruoh-Nan, Watchravesringkan & Chen, 2006), or dealing with suboptimal levels of power and control (Echo Wen, Vohs & Chen, 2014; Rucker, 2009; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Ruvio & Dubois, 2012). Further contextual motivations may include

store settings (Mohan, Sivakumaran & Sharma, 2013), social influence (Rook, 1987), and coping with natural disasters (Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2009).

The relationship between predispositions and triggers is important to appreciate and can be illustrated as follows. Imagine a person who has low self-esteem and tends towards depression. They may not necessarily engage in compensatory consumption unless there was an external stimulus, threat or trigger foregrounding their negative feelings and sparking a consumption cycle. On the other hand, elicited by a trigger, the predisposition may make people more susceptible to compensatory engagements.

Although available research concerning this distinction remains limited and further work is desirable, there are some useful examples where this differential is apparent. For instance, previous studies document that impediments like physical shortness (Stuppy, Paolacci & Ordabayeva, 2014) may elicit a range emotional reactions, which inspire compensatory behaviours and defence mechanisms. As a case in point, in experiments investigating vanity sizing, a group of female participants compensated for the unpleasant sensation elicited by their exposure to larger than expected clothing sizes. They spent more money on items that enhanced their appearance but were unrelated to size, when compared to the control group that was exposed to expected sizes of clothing (Hoegg, Scott, Morales & Dahl, 2014). While clothing size was the trigger in this study, there was a need for underlying predispositions making this variable relevant for participants.

What this emergent body of work suggests is that by bringing individuals' self-view to the surface, and thus prompting reflection upon physical attributes like height or body size that tap into enduring, private and stable aspects of the self, compensatory tendencies can be primed (Kim & Rucker, 2012). And based on the information presented in the table above, the potential additive effect of predispositions and triggers may be more pronounced in the case of the negative, compulsive and addictive behaviours than for more positive and therapeutic practices. Nevertheless, while this differential emerged on the basis of the reviewed work, it is unclear how the interaction may play out in real-life settings, warranting ongoing research.

The next element in the table concerns the goals that follow antecedents and drive engagement in the particular behavioural pursuit. In the case of more negative compulsive and addictive behaviours, these tend to be personal in nature, targeting psychological and emotional benefits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), mood repair (Elliott, Eccles & Gournay, 1996) or an enhanced personal appearance (Trautmann-Attmann & Johnson, 2009). Towards the right side of the table, a combination of needs become influential, blending personal needs with others that aim to fulfil social and interpersonal desires. In contrast with the compulsive and addictive shoppers' general aim to fill a void (Sohn & Choi, 2014; Spinella, Lester & Bijou, 2014), the

personal needs of impulsive, conspicuous and therapeutic consumers are geared towards rewarding and uplifting sensations (Amel, Dani El Kebir & Elyas, 2014; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), as well as the attainment of higher order needs (Hausman, 2000). Sharing and social aspects become prevalent, with a strong focus on achieving social standing and prestige (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010), socialisation and group affiliation (Mugge, Schifferstein & Schoormans, 2006), and other socially-orientated benefits (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2014).

Behavioural manifestations and consequences also show differential patterns. On the negative side, given that the behaviour does not meet the underlying needs, relapses into subsequent addictive and compulsive engagements are frequent, ultimately forming a cyclical pattern (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Even when the behaviour starts out as normal, it often spirals into chronic forms. Given this, it becomes incrementally disruptive to the individual's functioning (Achtziger, Hubert, Kenning, Raab & Reisch, 2015; Horváth, Adigüzel & van Herk, 2013). Compulsive and addictive consumers exhibit some tendency to indifference regarding the product, as their whole endeavour is centred around the purchase itself and the desired emotional and psychological benefits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992).

In contrast, the behaviours positioned at the positive side of the table differ from the above tendencies in four distinct ways. First, impulsive, conspicuous and self-gifting engagements entail a cognitive component that elevates them to a conscious level, remaining within the control of the individual (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Second, the pursued product or service assumes central importance, with the focus shifting from acquisition to usage, showcasing and social display, and ultimately loyalty and attachment (Chaudhuri, Mazumdar & Ghoshal, 2011; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Third, the consequences of consumption tend to be less negative and disruptive in comparison to compulsive and addictive consumption. While some post-purchase regret has been documented, individuals often rationalise their actions to suspend their sense of guilt (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998) and reduce any potential dissonance (Ward & Thuhang, 2007). These consumers also tend to experience lower financial risk (Bashar, Ahmad & Wasiq, 2013), exhibit a greater sense of deservedness (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013), and end up with more positive moods and evaluations of the shopping experience (Flight, Rountree & Beatty, 2012; Mick & Demoss, 1990). As the final point of distinction, these consumption engagements appear to be independent and self-contained events that do not necessarily lead to a cyclical pattern.

Building on our extensive review, the following definition is proposed which incorporates a more comprehensive view of compensatory consumption and thus better accounts for the complexities of this practice than prior conceptualisations:

Compensatory consumption encompasses a continuum of behaviours manifested in the purchase and use of goods and services that symbolically compensate for perceived discrepancies between ideal and actual self-states. Initiated by the interplay between a range of predispositions and immediate triggers, compensatory consumption captures behaviours ranging from cyclical and purchase-oriented engagements that entail disruptive outcomes and focus on the private self, to independent and product oriented encounters with a public emphasis and a sense of gratification.

A fresh look at compensatory consumption – Compensation or compromise?

To take research on compensatory consumption in new and potentially fruitful directions, we need to briefly return to the seminal work by Gronmo (1988). He differentiated between two mechanisms that elicit compensatory tendencies. The first scenario he outlines arises when there is a lack of consistency between the need and the motive generating the behaviour. In these situations, individuals are not consciously aware of the real need, and correspondingly their motive follows an artificial need stimulated by external forces like advertising and marketing campaigns. For example, someone with low self-esteem may be more likely to respond to a new smartphone ad by going out and purchasing it, although there is no immediate need given that their present phone is in good working order. The second scenario, by contrast, occurs when there is an inconsistency between the motive and the action. In these situations, whilst people are conscious of the real need, they are faced with resource poverty that prevents them from taking the most appropriate action. As such, they end up engaging in or buying inadequate secondary options. For instance, an individual longing for affection from their spouse may settle for a coffee or dinner date with a friend. The key similarity between both scenarios is that neither one of them result in actual need satisfaction.

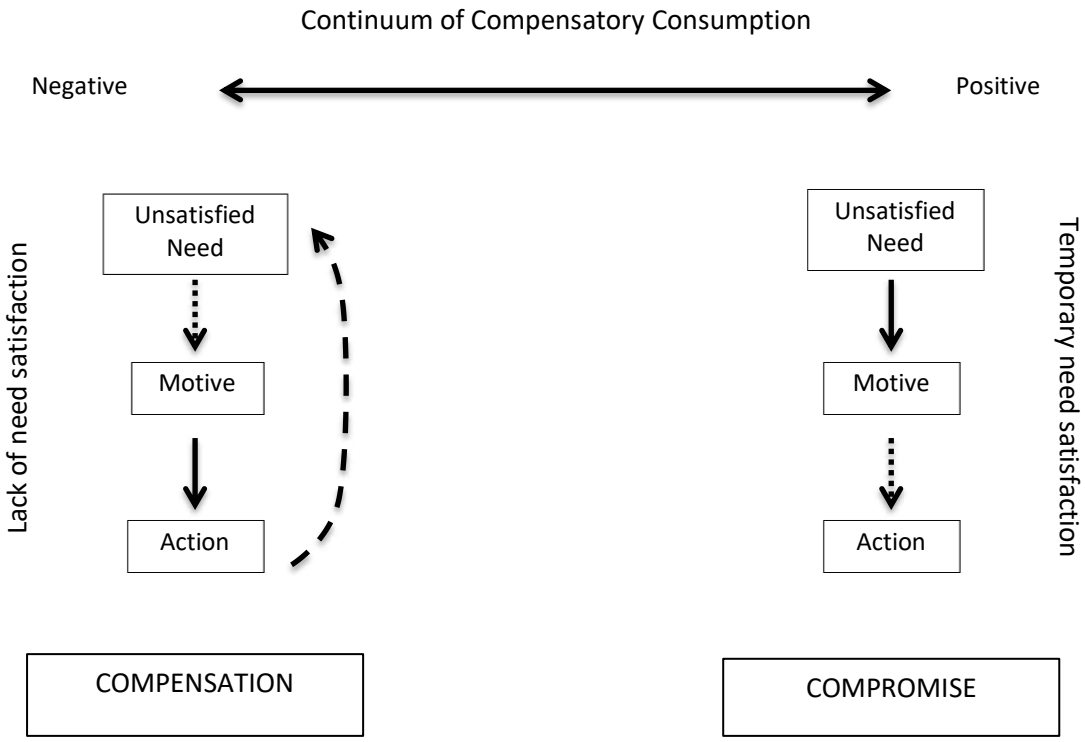
Parallels may be drawn between Gronmo's theory of need satisfaction and our review in Table 2. More specifically, the negative or left side of the table representing compulsive and addictive consumers can be related to the compensatory consumption form incorporating the need – motive inconsistency in Gronmo (1988)'s work. Being unaware of the real need, these individuals turn to consumption to fill a lack in their lives, hoping to achieve positive outcomes. Yet, the sought after goods remain unused or returned, various negative consequences are likely to follow, and as the deeply ingrained real need persists, the process does not result in need satisfaction. This is a trigger for a new compensatory cycle. The compensation process – not single episode – begins again.

In contrast, the positive or right side of the table corresponding to the more therapeutic consumption forms can be paralleled with Gronmo's motive – action inconsistency. Being more

conscious of the real need, these people turn to consumption to fill a specific lack in their lives. But, given the resource poverty to which they are exposed, it ends up being an alternative to the real need. Compensation processes are therefore largely diachronic in nature. Furthermore, they are practices sometimes underwritten by a logic of compromise, at least for some consumers.

With this insight in mind, we tentatively propose that an important distinction can be drawn between the two consumption styles which must be accounted for conceptually and studied in much greater depth empirically. In particular, while the behaviour of individuals at the negative end of our proposed continuum does largely reflect compensatory practice, the behaviour of others at the more positive end appears to reflect a slightly different process. These consumers recognise the real need at hand but cannot obtain it. Instead they find an alternative source to address their wish, lack, desire or other motivation. Despite not being fully satisfied with their consumption outcome, they are likely to achieve at least temporary satisfaction. This is a marked contrast to their compulsive counterparts who experience no such resolution. Given the decisive process that results in settling for an alternative, it may be more accurate to think of these latter behaviours as a form of *compromise* rather than compensation. A brief overview extending Gronmo (1988)'s theory to reflect upon these ideas can be found in Figure 1. In the figure, solid lines represent consistency between the constructs they connect, while dotted lines represent inconsistency.

FIGURE 1. Applying Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction to the continuum of compensatory consumption.



As a practical illustration of this model consider the following. Imagine Lisa, who is struggling with depression, low self-esteem, and recurrent anxieties. She tries to escape her enduring negative sensations via consumption. If Lisa *treats* herself to a large Starbucks latte and a chocolate chip muffin, she is likely to regret her decision, focus on aspects of overspending, breaking dietary promises, being unhealthy and exacerbate her negative moods. Overall, her compensation attempt is likely to be unsuccessful, the experience will be kept hidden, and with the probable return of the same sentiments and aggravations, a new compensatory cycle will emerge.

As a counterpoint, imagine Mike, who just received positive news about his promotion, and invited his friend out for dinner to celebrate. On his way home from work, he learns that his friend is out of town on a job-related assignment. Dinner plans are scuppered. Looking up and seeing a Starbucks, whilst still feeling in a celebratory mood, Mike decides to pop in and treat himself to a latte and muffin. This was not the way he envisaged his evening nor the preferred option, but Mike is still likely to view his Starbucks encounter in a positive light as a gratifying act that symbolically marks his success. These examples also illustrate the subjective and highly contextualised nature of compensatory and compromisory consumption, emphasising the individual's subsequent *interpretation* of the situation at hand.

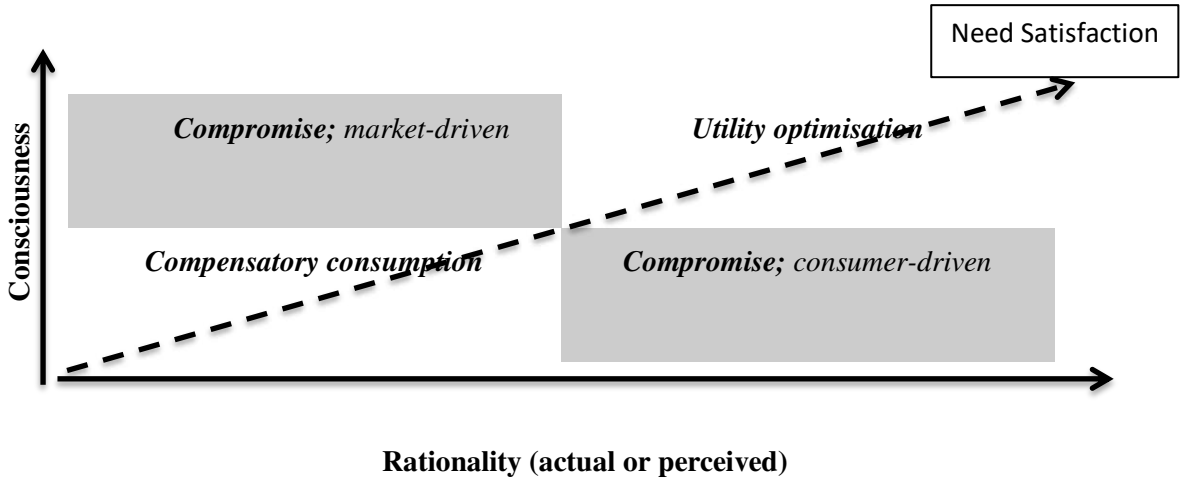
In order to develop this model further, let us briefly consider the conceptual background of compromise. This term has a long-standing history with a cultural evolution that resulted in variations in usage, interpretation and overall meaning (Fumurescu, 2013). In the extant literature, compromise is frequently explored in choice situations (Chuang, Cheng, Chang & Chiang, 2013; Simonson & Tversky, 1992), with the compromise effect referring to people's preference for intermediate options that enable them to avoid extremes (Carroll & Vallen, 2014; Cova, Pace & Skålén, 2015; Mao, 2016).

In the philosophical arena, Day (1989) offers a more dyadic definition of compromise as reflecting "an agreement between A and B to make mutual concessions in order to resolve a conflict between them" (p. 472). Moving closer to the area of marketing and management, insight can be drawn from the pioneering work of Harry Tosdal. Based on his work, Tadajewski (2016) coined the term "the compromising consumer" (p. 319), encapsulating how many exchanges in the marketplace are not our optimal or idealised choices, yet not undesirable in their own right. Tosdal (1940), in particular, sketched out four different types of compromises which we have grouped into two separate categories. We refer to the first category by the term *market-driven compromise* that occurs when the most desired choice is unavailable (i.e. out-of-stock) or the decision is overly complex and poses too many competing options for the consumer. Our second category is labelled *consumer-driven compromise* to capture situations

when the consumer either has unrealistic expectations or unlimited wants (i.e. wants it all), or is unaware of the true underlying needs and desires that initiates the behaviour in the first place.

Merging the reviewed material on need satisfaction and compromise, Figure 2 is provided to facilitate further conceptual discussion and empirical exploration. The vertical axis represents the level of consciousness characterising the consumer's behaviour, while the horizontal axis corresponds to their level of rationality. Here we reflect upon Markin's work which attributes little value to the rational / irrational debate, and instead encourages scholars to "explore the more legitimate and concomitantly more manageable psychological issues of how consumers rationalise their behaviour" (1979, p. 317). Consequently, we adopt a dual approach to incorporate rationality; one that concerns the actual scenario and corresponds to real cognitive states, and another that concerns the perceived scenario and captures states of mind achieved following a process of rationalisation.

FIGURE 2. The extent of consciousness and rationality within the theoretical orbit of compensatory and compromisory consumption.



The figure differentiates between four types of consumption as a function of varying extents of consciousness and rationality. The first quadrant representing compensatory consumption entails low levels of consciousness, as these engagements take place largely outside of the consumer's immediate awareness. In an attempt to address enduring needs and discrepancies between actual and ideal personal states, compensation is pursued to remedy disturbing negative sensations. For example, a generally depressed individual prone to compulsive behaviours may purchase the latest iPhone in response to repeated advertisements and to seeing others in possession of the item, unconsciously aspiring for this new technology to boost their self-esteem and increase their sense of power. These engagements are seemingly highly irrational, and occur irrespective of potential financial consequences and hardship that are likely to follow. On the other extreme along the two dimensions, in the quadrant corresponding to utility-optimisation, consumers tend to act out of rational considerations and be highly conscious of their behavioural intent. They conduct prior research to explore different options, contemplate the pros and cons of having an iPhone as opposed to, for instance, a Sony Xperia. When they eventually conclude that their selection is likely to outperform alternative offerings, they subsequently proceed with their purchase.

Regarding the remaining two quadrants, we find the possibility for compromise to occur in one of two ways. Individuals may compromise out of market-driven motivations, where they are conscious of the real underlying need but are faced with either a resource scarcity or an overabundance of choice. Imagine a consumer, for instance, who is in the market to buy a phone, as their current one is no longer in working condition. Purchasing a phone can be a daunting experience, with an overwhelming variety of choice complicating evaluation and decision-making. While the iPhone may not be the most economical choice or absolutely commensurate with consumer needs, it still presents a shortcut to thinking. These engagements entail at least some anticipatory planning, but do not involve a comprehensive comparative assessment that is customary for the utility optimising consumer (assuming the existence of this rare creature for the moment).

Individuals may also compromise out of consumer-driven motivations, with impulse buying and conspicuous consumption being exemplars. An individual with low self-image, for example, may wish to acquire the latest iPhone to increase their social power. They might act out of impulse and find the choice attractive given its status-related benefits that emphasise the socially acceptable nature of their choice, and, in turn, cementing them to the focal brand community. Individuals engaging in these practices are not necessarily completely aware of the "real" need that drives their behaviour. Despite this, they are ready to identify justifications for their actions which perform a reality that does not generate dissonance.

It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. They are highly contextualised and situation and person specific. In other words, depending on the context and the product, individuals are likely to fall into different categories that will change from situation to situation.

Discussion and future research directions

This paper has assessed the present state of research and expanded upon current conceptual understandings of compensatory consumption. The final section will make specific recommendations for future research.

From a conceptual standpoint, we advocate a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption; one that captures a continuum of behaviours, accounts for pre- and post-consumption periods, and reaches beyond the consumption of material goods. Prior work has often portrayed compensatory consumption as a single isolated behaviour associated with an independent event like purchasing a pair of jeans or buying a particular music album (Paim, 1995; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). Throughout this paper, we have emphasised the importance of contextual considerations, as well as assigned more weight to the consumer's evaluation of the situation than has been customary in existing research. In fact, it has been suggested that the *interaction* between dispositional and situational factors tend to have the largest explanatory power in unravelling compensatory tendencies; a direction that should be pursued in future research (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014).

Applying aspects of goal theory to the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption may also be meaningful, yet has not been taken forward in the existing literature. Examining the interaction between self-construal and goal-type on motivation for goal pursuit, Haiyang, Stamatogiannakis and Chattopadhyay (2015) distinguish between attainment goals, where individuals' actual state on certain dimensions differs from their desired state, as opposed to maintenance goals, where the actual and the desired states are already matching. The researchers conclude that for consumers with independent self-construal, which emphasises individual advancement, attainment goals tend to be more motivating, whereas for those with interdependent self-construal, which emphasises stability and continuity, maintenance goals become more relevant.

For the purposes of our argument, people engaging in compensation are faced with a greater discrepancy between their ideal and desired states, are further away from their optimal goal, and are less likely to achieve need satisfaction and goal attainment. This, in turn, may increase the likelihood of subsequent compensatory cycles. The same discrepancy may be less substantial for a compromising consumer, who is closer to the desired state, and is likely to

achieve at least partial need satisfaction. Further research should address the potential motivational differences between compensatory and compromisory consumers in greater depth.

Another area that requires greater attention concerns the period that follows consumption. After seeking a particular product, individuals often experience post-purchase dissonance that may result from the amount of choice available in contemporary society and the inability to judge whether or not the right decision has been made (Markin & Narayana, 1976). Consequently, consumers may engage in a rationalisation process, and try to convince themselves that they did, indeed, make the right choice. Markin (1979) conceptualises rationalisation as a defence mechanism that enables individuals to provide socially acceptable reasons to justify their behaviour. It may also be interesting to explore whether rationalisation plays a role in product categorisation, in that it may alter the conceptualisation of products in terms of a hedonic or utilitarian calculus from the perspective of the individual (Khan & Dhar, 2010; Voss, Spangenberg & Grohmann, 2003). The application of these ideas to compensatory and compromisory consumption may help disentangle the emotional and cognitive processes that characterise consumer reflection during the post-consumption period.

Future research should explore the extent to which negative consumption or non-consumption may be relevant in the area of compensatory and compromisory consumption. For instance, Buchanan-Oliver and Savage (2006) suggest that choosing not to consume a product can be just as significant in terms of defining self-identity as choosing one (Nixon & Gabriel, 2016).

Methodologically much of the work on compensatory consumption builds on student-based samples (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo & Rucker, 2015). This is likely to limit transferability of the findings (Park & Lessig, 1977). Connected to this, we encourage scholars to continue the important interpretive work of Woodruffe (1997), Hamilton (2014) and others, and move beyond experimental laboratories and explore compensatory tendencies in real life settings (Echo Wen, Vohs & Chen, 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim & Rucker, 2015). This is especially important in the study of complex phenomena that entails personally-driven, emotionally charged and only partially conscious processes – all of which are difficult to reproduce within laboratory boundaries (Ariely, 2008; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). In this vein, work that elaborates upon the influence of specific events, situations and contextual occurrences on compensatory and compromisory consumption is highly desirable.

As mentioned above, there is a need for greater diversification of methodologies in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption. Using the diagram in Figure 2, we illustrated that different behaviours entail different levels of conscious awareness, rationality and rationalisation; a point which has important implications for methodology. While quantitative

and experimental approaches may work well in exploring transactions and consumption engagements where the consumer is highly attentive, this may not be the case in other scenarios. This suggests the need for more qualitative and mixed-methods approaches which are under-utilised in this area. Beyond phenomenological interviews, several other creative examples can be identified from the distal literature that remain largely underrepresented in studies on this topic, including the diary method (Brown, Costley, Friend & Varey, 2010; Crowley, 1996; Götze, Prange & Uhrovska, 2009; Iida, Shrout, Laurenceau & Bolger, 2012), scripts (Puto, 1985) and critical incident techniques (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson & Maglio, 2005; Gremler, 2004). Utilising visual methods, such as the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (Zaltman, 1997, 2000, 2014) may also prove to be advantageous, in terms of helping us better probe consumers to reveal the ways in which unconscious thinking drives their compensatory and compromisory behaviour (Zaltman, 2002).

In conclusion, the framework we have offered for compensatory consumption, incorporating a continuum of behaviours and accounting for the pre- and post-consumption periods, addresses on-going debates in the field and has complimented the available literature in a substantive fashion. We greatly expanded upon Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction, introducing a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. By differentiating between compensatory and compromisory consumption, we further developed and deepened our conceptual understanding of this important and still under researched area.

Figure Captions

FIGURE 1. Applying Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction to the continuum of compensatory consumption.

FIGURE 2. The extent of consciousness and rationality within the theoretical orbit of compensatory and compromisory consumption.

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