

## CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELL-BEING: TWO COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES? A NARRATIVE REVIEW.

Neoline Le Roux\*, Daleen van der Merwe, Cilas Wilders & Marié Wissing

### ABSTRACT

Globalisation contributes to an abundance of marketing, which stimulates unneeded and unplanned purchases. Research indicates that although consumers differ in terms of their purchasing styles and their consideration of immediate and future consequences of purchases, they are also strongly influenced by their social environment. This is even more applicable to consumers who reside in urban environments, since they are to a greater extent exposed to products, social and work pressures. Hence, in order to minimise pressures, consumers often purchase socially motivated products such as idealistic household equipment. Household equipment comprises products that strongly communicate social standing and status in a symbolic manner. Literature in different fields has been examined in order to compile a connection-focused informative literature review, which provides a unique argument of interpretation from these various texts and settings. This review therefore highlights the implications regarding decision-making and a consideration of future consequences of decisions on consumers' psycho-social well-being. To this end, the links between these fields of study are explored. To conclude, the importance of empirical research in the field is highlighted in order to empower consumers towards improved decision-making which could aid in their psycho-social well-being.

#### — Mrs N Le Roux\*

Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research  
North-West University  
Potchefstroom  
South Africa  
Tel: +27 (0)18 299 2083  
Fax: +27 (0)18 299 2470  
Email: Neoline.LeRoux@nwu.ac.za  
\*Corresponding author

#### — Prof D van der Merwe

Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research  
North-West University  
Potchefstroom

South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)18 299 2476

Fax: +27 (0)18 299 2470

Email: Daleen.VanderMerwe@nwu.ac.za

#### — Prof C Wilders

<sup>1</sup> University of Namibia

Namibia

<sup>2</sup> Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research

North-West University

Potchefstroom

South Africa

Tel: +26 461 206 4750

Email: cwilders@unam.na

cilas.wilders@nwu.ac.za

#### — Prof MP Wissing

Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research

North-West University

Potchefstroom

South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)18 299 2603

Fax: +27(0)86 614 9042

Email: Marie.Wissing@nwu.ac.za

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### INTRODUCTION

Consumers experience various physical and emotional needs and desires on a daily basis (Solomon, 2013). Ascribed to globalisation, consumers are confronted with an abundance of marketing information and product choices aimed at stimulating purchases, regardless of whether it represents actual needs (Sinkovics *et al.*, 2010; Lysonski & Durvasula, 2013). Consequently, consumers often make decisions

without much thought (Potgieter *et al.*, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014), which contributes to the complexity and styles involved during consumer decision-making. Consumers therefore differ in terms of decision-making styles and their consideration of the immediate and future consequences of their decisions (Hiu *et al.*, 2001; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). Research indicates that consumers' decisions are strongly influenced by their social groups (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014) – this is especially the case with consumers residing in urban environments (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). These influences place consumers under social and emotional pressure in response to their need to conform and their desire to improve their self-esteem by consuming status-related products (Bookwalter & Dalenberg, 2010).

Social pressure, along with targeted marketing approaches, guides consumers towards directed purchases such as branded household appliances and furniture (hereafter referred to as household equipment<sup>1</sup>), which gives the illusion that the desired lifestyle can be achieved and that it would make consumers equal to or better than their desired social group (Wänke, 2009; Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Consequently, household equipment plays an important role in the everyday functioning of a household, but also has an impact on the comfort, stylishness and social acceptability of a home (Donoghue *et al.*, 2008; Nakazato *et al.*, 2011; Wood & Hayes, 2012).

If consumers do not pay heed to the unspoken social expectations, they stand the risk to be socially rejected (Solomon, 2013). Many consumers therefore find it important to act quickly on desires by purchasing desirable items with the intention to increase their social standing (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). This impulsive behaviour is often unconsciously driven since the consumption of certain products serves consumers with social, psychological and symbolic purposes by granting them the opportunity to express their identity and status (Carlisle *et al.*, 2008) and as a result to influence their psycho-social well-being.

However, irresponsible and impulsive purchases to satisfy the need to portray a certain identity

and to belong to desirable social groups can lead to unmanageable debt (Billieux *et al.*, 2008) and subsequent high levels of stress (Hodson *et al.*, 2014; Drentea & Reynolds, 2015). High levels of stress that continue over long periods, may jeopardise consumers' overall well-being (Clayton *et al.*, 2015; Drentea & Reynolds, 2015; Yilmazer *et al.*, 2015). Given the negative effects of stress, purchases that are generally regarded to give consumers satisfaction, may become unmanageable if it is not addressed effectively (Billieux *et al.*, 2008).

Although there is an abundance of research available on consumer decision-making (Starcke & Brand, 2012) as well as on stress and psycho-social well-being (Wood & Hayes, 2012; Sweet *et al.*, 2013), to the knowledge of the authors, little research has addressed the correlation between the ways in which consumers make decisions and the psycho-social well-being of consumers. This correlation is regarded as important since literature on consumer decision-making indicates that psycho-social aspects play a role during decision-making. The psychosocial field is for instance indicated to be integrated into the process of decision-making, but the correlation between consumer decision-making and psycho-social aspects does not seem to be explicitly indicated. Therefore, this review investigates how consumer decision-making literature can emphasise psycho-social well-being in addressing the correlation between the two constructs from both a consumer behaviour and psycho-social point of view. The aim of this article is to integrate the literature and contributions from various researchers in the fields in an informative theoretical narrative review. These fields include consumer behaviour, consumer decision-making – with a focus on consumer decision-making styles and consideration of immediate and future consequences of decisions – and psycho-social well-being in order to address the identified gap in literature concerning the relation between consumer decision-making and consumers' psycho-social well-being, as well as how these two constructs contribute to the stress levels experienced by consumers.

<sup>1</sup> Home appliances and furniture refer to household equipment used in different areas of the house to add to the lifestyle and living circumstances of the consumer. It includes products such as kitchen appliances (e.g. microwaves, dishwashers, washing machines) and other types of products such as television sets, stereo systems and furniture. This product category was chosen for the medium to high risks connected with this type of purchases and since not all consumers are able to purchase larger items such as a car or a house. Hereafter the term *household equipment* will be used for these items.

### Methodology of the present study

The methodology was approached according to the guidelines of Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) for a comprehensive narrative review. Search words that were used included “consumer decision-making”, “decision-making styles”, “immediate and future consequences”, “psycho-social well-being”, “debt”, “household equipment”, “urban environment” and “consumption”. These search words were used in various combinations and in different search engines, including Science Direct, JSTOR, EbscoHost and Google Scholar. Field-specific books on these topics were also consulted in order to comprehensively address the objectives of this article. Due to the constantly changing nature of the retail environment and consumer purchases, the latest “grey” literature (which is described as unpublished literature) (McDonagh *et al.*, 2013), such as marketing review reports, were studied to gain more insight into this dynamic area and reduce possible bias. Reference lists of applicable articles were also consulted to identify relevant literature that deepened the search and ensure comprehensiveness. Furthermore, additional material was included upon recommendation of the different authors involved in different fields of study.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for searches entailed that the articles had to be in English, be peer reviewed (except in the case of the latest grey literature), and fall within the main argument of the article according to the scope set out by the objectives. Although no specific time frame was set for the articles that were consulted, the authors started with the latest literature and worked backwards down the timeline towards originally published literature with authority regarding the constructs. Literature was excluded if it was not peer reviewed, if the abstracts gave the impression that the article would not fall within the scope of the study and if it was based on secondary sources.

Topics with controversial and rich backgrounds such as theories on consumer decision-making, consumer decision-making styles and consideration of immediate and future consequences, were summarised by means of tables that highlight the main findings, such as differentiation in contexts, countries and sample groups; and attention to the validity and reliability of studies and scales. After studying and combining the literature, the authors were

able to compile a unique argument of interpretation by following the CORE (critical examination, organisation, reflection and evaluation) process (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016) to compile a comprehensive theoretical narrative review. The collaborating authors reduced possible individual bias by judiciously reviewing and discussing the applicability of the included literature. This process contributed to the CORE process being connection-focused and considering a culturally progressive and ethical approach (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016).

### CONSUMPTION IN A SATURATED RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

Consumers use different types of products to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2013) through various mental and physical processes associated with decision-making. These processes involve activities such as the search for, selection and purchase of products that would satisfy identified needs, along with the evaluation and disposing of products after usage (Mpiganjira *et al.*, 2013; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013; Solomon, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). Consumer decision-making involve different levels of involvement and often various purchases are made without much prior thought (Sinkovics *et al.*, 2010; Lysonski & Durvasula, 2013; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013). Such unreasoned purchases are often attributed to globalisation that increasingly exposes consumers to an abundance of stores, products, advertisements and experiences competing for the expenditure of the consumer, which collectively influence the manner in which decisions are made as well as the complexity of choices (Lysonski *et al.*, 1996). Due to the development of technology, exposure to products is not just limited to stores or even to ‘business hours’ but consumers are able to view, search for and purchase products in comfort and privacy around the clock, with the consequence that decision-making concerning products is not limited to certain spaces or times (Hoyer *et al.*, 2013).

Although plentiful choices can be overwhelming and stressful to the consumer, it is associated with autonomy and well-being (Markus & Schwartz, 2010) since freedom of choice is seen as important to improve consumer quality of life in Western democratic societies. As the consumer market becomes progressively globalised, research on consumer decision-making is gaining more attention globally (Bao *et al.*, 2003; Bae & Lee, 2010). In order to address and serve in the constantly changing

needs and wants of consumers, a thorough understanding of consumers' behaviour and decision-making is required which can be achieved by studying consumers' patterns of cognition and behaviour (Gardarsdottir *et al.*, 2009; Workman & Cho, 2012).

### **INFLUENCES ON CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES THERETO**

Consumers engage in decision-making on a daily basis concerning every aspect of their lives. Some of these decisions involve high cognitive effort and others are made without consciously thinking about them (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). Consequently consumer decision-making – as an integral part of consumer behaviour – is regarded as a complex phenomenon during which consumers are involved in different levels of decision-making when they have to decide on a product or service, depending on the importance or future consequences of the decision, along with the type of purchase involved (Babin & Harris, 2011; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). These levels of decision-making have been classified by various researchers in certain categories. *Extensive problem solving* takes place when consumers have no set criteria to narrow down the available choices and they therefore engage in extensive internal and external information searches, as in the case of expensive or technically complicated products with high risks (e.g. household equipment). *Limited problem solving* usually occurs during relatively low-risk purchases, where consumers have established sets of criteria against which to evaluate products (e.g. replacing an outdated laptop or cell phone). These consumers do not engage in an extensive search for new information, but also do not have fully established preferences towards selected groups of brands or product types. Lastly, *routinised/habitual response behaviour* is applicable to consumers with previous experience of a product and well-established sets of criteria according to which to evaluate the consideration and to search for limited additional information or review known information (Babin & Harris, 2011; Solomon, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014).

Although many researchers and marketers distinguish between decisions that are rational and decisions that are not (Starcke & Brand, 2012), it has been accepted that consumers do not always make well-calculated strategic decisions. Consumer decision-making is thus

not always only based on rational thoughts, but at times includes internal and external influences (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). Internal influences include emotions, depending on the type of needs or products that are being considered (Babin & Harris, 2011) while external influences include strong social influences from family, friends and peer groups, along with marketing efforts (Mpinganjira *et al.*, 2013). Even though various consumer behaviour theories explain decision-making to happen in a structured sequence of processes following upon each other, decision-making may also be explained to occur in a dual process. Dual process decision-making in both cognitive and social psychology is concerned with reasoning and related higher cognitive thinking (Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Alós-Ferrer & Strack, 2014). Dual process decision-making is described as the interplay of cognitive processing that add to observed behaviour, namely type 1 ('automatic', intuitive and naturally fast decision-making) opposed to type 2 (reasoned and reflective decision-making that requires working memory and that is therefore slower) (Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Alós-Ferrer & Strack, 2014). Although many researchers regard these two types of decision-making be two parallel main streams of decision-making, it is argued by Evans and Stanovich (2013) the two types are rather default-interventionist in structure. In other words, although type 1 processes, which are the default, control most of consumers' behaviour, type 2 will only occur during more complex and difficult decisions where a higher order of thinking is required. Consumers are thus not only influenced by certain specific internal and external factors, but also by various interactive brain systems that influence choice behaviour. Brocas and Carrillo (2014) contribute to consumers' decision-making ability to a default-interventionist manner which consequently will influence their ability to consider the implications of their current decisions.

### **Influences on decision-making**

When confronted with a purchase decision, consumers unconsciously seek information from various internal factors, such as previous experiences, attitudes, opinions and beliefs, as well as external factors, i.e. the price, brand and quality along with cultural and social class influences, depending on the product type (Fan & Xiao, 1998; Hiu *et al.*, 2001; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2011; Modi & Jhulka, 2012). However, apart from these internal and external factors, Hoyer

*et al.* (2013) argue that different characteristics of consumers (i.e. expertise, mood, time pressure, extremeness aversion and metacognitive experiences), the situation (i.e. information availability, information format and trivial attributes) and the group context and influence of the social group add to decision-making. Consumers therefore differ with regard to their level of psychological engagement with brands and products due to different needs, motives and goals, depending on whether decisions are utilitarian driven or psycho-socially motivated with the hope to achieve a sense of community (Schmitt, 2012). For that reason, consumers' social identities or acceptance by certain communities are strongly influenced by their consumption behaviour, with the result that rational decision-making and future consideration of decisions are often overridden by socially motivated decisions (Baumeister *et al.*, 2008; Carlisle *et al.*, 2008; Starcke & Brand, 2012). Consequently, consumers continuously strive towards upward mobility by spending more on products that will explicitly indicate their social standing and status (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Erasmus *et al.*, 2011).

As consumers rise in their social standing or social class, the intensity to satisfy certain needs increases as they tend to compare themselves to their peer groups and find satisfaction from fitting in or doing better (Bookwalter & Dalenberg, 2010; Modi & Jhulka, 2012). This longing to belong to certain sought-after groups, influences consumers' subjective well-being (Bookwalter & Dalenberg, 2010), seeing that the possession or lack of ownership of desired objects affect consumers' lives and influence the way they feel about themselves and others (Solomon, 2013). Due to the complexity of decision-making, consumers thus resort to different decision-making styles to reflect the type of psychology in decision-making when they evaluate alternative products and services (Baoku *et al.*, 2010; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013; Sproles & Kendall, 1986).

### **Consumer decision-making styles and the consumer style index**

Consumer decision-making styles (CDMS) entail the mental and psychological orientation characterising consumers' subconscious approaches towards purchasing choices which focuses on the cognitive (such as quality) and affective (such as fashion) orientations of decision-making (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013). These orientations towards decision-making are regarded the most

ideal and explanatory to determine consumer decision-making styles (Yang & Wu, 2007; Anic *et al.*, 2012). Sproles and Kendall (1986) developed the Consumer Style Index (CSI), which represents a systematic attempt to create a strong methodology for measuring consumers' purchasing orientations and behaviour (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2004). The CSI proved to be a useful measuring tool by containing both the cognitive and affective features that are directly linked to consumer choices, while simultaneously providing a foundation for the standardised testing of CDMS (Walsh *et al.*, 2001).

The CSI opened a new direction in consumer decision-making research (Bao *et al.*, 2003) and until recently was used in various studies worldwide, such as the United Kingdom (e.g. Bakewell & Mitchell, 2004), China (e.g. Zhu *et al.*, 2012), Germany (e.g. Mitchell & Walsh, 2004), Iran (e.g. Hanzae & Aghasibeig, 2008), Australia (e.g. Nayeem, 2012), Singapore (e.g. Bae & Lee, 2010), India (e.g. Lysonski & Durvasula, 2013) and in various cross-country studies (e.g. Leng & Botelho, 2010; Anic *et al.*, 2012). The CSI was also used and adapted in South Africa (e.g. Radder *et al.*, 2006; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013). During the development of the CSI, Sproles and Kendall (1986) identified eight basic styles of consumer decision-making in a shopping context, which remain relevant:

1. *Perfectionistic, high quality orientated consumers* search for superior quality products that are not only 'good enough' and they shop more carefully, systematic or by comparing products;
2. *Brand conscious, 'price equals quality'* oriented consumers often buy the more expensive, well-known national (or international) brands and are thus more likely to believe that a higher price equals a higher quality product;
3. *Novelty-fashion conscious* consumers are mostly fashion and novelty conscious. They gain great excitement and pleasure from seeking new things and having a variety of products to choose from;
4. *Recreational and hedonistic shopping* conscious consumers find shopping pleasant and often shop for enjoyment;
5. *Price conscious, 'value for money'* oriented consumers are often on the outlook for sale prices and appear conscious of lower prices in general while also being concerned with best value for money products by comparing products to one another;

6. *Impulsive and careless* consumers do not plan their shopping and appear to be unconcerned about the amount spent or about buying the best possible product;
7. *Confused by over-choice* oriented consumers perceive many brands and stores from which to choose as confusing and too much information creates an information overload; and
8. *Habitual, brand-loyal* consumers have favourite brands and stores and habitual behaviour is typical of this group.

These decision-making styles can further be divided into **utilitarian** or **hedonistic** shopping styles (Zhou *et al.*, 2010). *Utilitarian* shopping styles (such as quality consciousness, price and value consciousness, confused by over-choice and impulsiveness) are mostly adapted by consumers who are focused on price, value and quality and therefore these styles are more task oriented (Zhou *et al.*, 2010; Solomon, 2013). Oppositely, *hedonistic* shopping styles (such as brand consciousness, novelty and fashion consciousness, recreational and hedonistic shopping, as well as brand loyalty) reflect non-essential, non-product aspects of shopping behaviour and are regarded as personal gratification, desire and self-expression (Zhou *et al.*, 2010; Solomon, 2013) linked to social status. Hence, all consumers cannot be regarded as making decisions in the same manner, but display relatively consistent individual decision-making styles guided by purchasing strategies and rules depending on the type of products while often being unconsciously influenced by the marketing and social environment such as stores, culture and social groups (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2004; Potgieter *et al.*, 2013). Due to the increasing availability of online shopping, the traditional definition of stores are being challenged as consumers are able to address needs in virtual shopping spaces with increased privacy, comfort and choices (Reinartz, 2016). Consequently, consumers who engage in impulsive purchasing due to personal gratification gained from addressing an identified need, may be more prone to resort towards online shopping because of its constant availability and they might not sufficiently take the consequences of their decisions into account, such as unmanageable debt.

#### **Immediate and future consequences of decision-making**

In the same way that consumers are unaware of their CDMS during purchases, they may also be

unaware of the immediate and/or future consequences of their decisions. Consumers form part of a large and complex society in which they have to abide by rules and at times need to make sacrifices for their own ultimate well-being (Baumeister *et al.*, 2008). However, consumers differ with regard to their consideration of the consequences of their current behaviour (Strathman *et al.*, 1994). In order to address this, Strathman *et al.* (1994) developed the 12-point consideration of future consequences scale to determine consumers' concern with future and immediate consequences of their decisions, which was later revised to a 14-point scale (Joireman *et al.*, 2012). As a result, future-orientated consumers will sacrifice immediate benefits – such as gaining immediate pleasure from a purchase or social recognition – in order to ensure desirable future conditions, such as financial stability or security (Strathman *et al.*, 1994; Pavia & Mason, 2004; Toepoel, 2010). Present-oriented consumers, on the other hand, do not consider the future consequences of their current behaviour and as a result are more concerned with experiencing high levels of current satisfaction or pleasure and will engage in impulsive purchases despite the future consequences that might occur (Strathman *et al.*, 1994; Pavia & Mason, 2004; Toepoel, 2010). Hence, the extent to which consumers take the future consequences of their current behaviour into consideration is likely to have an influence on their attitudes, behaviours and information processing and therefore contributes to their own well-being (Strathman *et al.*, 1994; Baumeister *et al.*, 2008). Thus the consideration of future consequences emphasise the focus on consumers' intrapersonal struggles between present behaviour and immediate and future outcomes, such as the effect of irresponsible spending on future well-being, which can be adapted by mastering self-control over consumption behaviour (Baumeister *et al.*, 2008; Rappange *et al.*, 2009; Toepoel, 2010).

#### **Consumption as the goal of consumer decision-making**

Consumption forms an important part of consumers' lives and by studying consumption, a better understanding of consumers can be gained (Jansson-Boyd, 2010; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012). Consumers are exposed to different marketing efforts on a daily basis within a social context, and these efforts often influence consumers' attitudes, beliefs and usage of certain products in order to express a

certain lifestyle or make certain social impressions, to be regarded part of desired social groups (Wänke, 2009). Luxury purchases are thus often made to gain access to the benefits and rewards reserved for those of a high social group (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Consequently, consumers generally experience a sense of belonging and well-being upon understanding their social placement in society, and in order to achieve this sense of belonging and well-being, possessions are used to express and categorise themselves based on the material meaning attached to those possessions (Wänke, 2009; Jansson-Boyd, 2010).

Consumers are social in nature and concerned with creating their identity according to the social group to which they belong – this guides their purchasing behaviour and contributes to the status they experience (Champriss *et al.*, 2015). Belonging to this group shapes consumers' social identity and the status they experience. Consumers therefore have shared meanings and judgments of products and seek out those in similar social status groups in order to make either upward or downward social comparisons (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Consumers may pay a high price for not conforming with the ideas of relevant others, by being rejected or embarrassed by the group (Mpinganjira *et al.*, 2013; Solomon, 2013). This desire towards upward mobility and increased social standing serves as a strong motivator to consume newer and better products that will replace products that were previously regarded as satisfactory (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). As consumers are confronted with social expectations, their aspirations rise, with the result that the current lifestyle becomes unsatisfying and needs develop for newer and better products that would allow them to better conform to the new standards set by the social group (Pandelaere, 2016). This is especially applicable to consumers living in urban environments in South Africa, who tend to have high levels of status consciousness (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011).

The desire towards status in social environments therefore encourages consumers to engage in status-driven purchases, such as desirable and fashionable household equipment (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, household equipment purchases are often motivated by marketing efforts that create the impression that certain products will enhance material, social and overall well-being due to increased quality

of living (Nakazato *et al.*, 2011; Zhong & Mitchell, 2012).

### **CONSUMPTION OF HOUSEHOLD EQUIPMENT AND ACCOMPANYING RISKS**

Household equipment is regarded as essential for comfortable living (Danziger, 2004) and the demand for household equipment are continually increasing as more consumers in South Africa are gaining access to electrical supplies and have higher disposable incomes (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2013). Many consumers invest a large proportion of their resources in creating desirable homes with the hope of increasing their well-being (Nakazato *et al.*, 2011). Household equipment have accordingly become social symbols used by South African consumers to indicate socio-economic status and serve as indicators of progress and prosperity (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2011). Thus, when consumers purchase household equipment, the emotional satisfaction gained from owning certain types of products also serves as important purchase motivators (Danziger, 2004).

Consumers purchase certain household equipment as it is seen to influence the quality of a home and to affect their psychological well-being, identity or self-esteem (Robinson & Adams, 2008). During these purchases, products' features, usability and benefits are often primary drivers for sales, along with price, credit terms and conditions (Danziger, 2004), but value in terms of status and social affiliations may boost excessive and irrational consumption of these products (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). Consumers may thus attribute the most value to the brand name, style, design and finish of the product due to the status that is related to exterior aspects and technological features (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, many consumers display branded household equipment with desirable exterior design features in their homes to indicate their level of wealth and achievements to significant others and to reduce the possibility of various emotional and social risks (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2011).

Depending on the type of products purchased, certain types and levels of risks are involved during purchases, with either positive or negative consequences for the consumer (Bruyneel *et al.*, 2009; Mpinganjira *et al.*, 2013). Although the level of risk differs between consumers, the product type and purchase environment are strong indicators of the

possible level of risks pertaining to purchases that consumers might experience (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). These risks include psycho-social risks (*will the purchase conform with the ideas of the social group?*) (Solomon, 2013), functional risks (*will the product function effectively?*), physical risks (*will the product possibly harm the consumer?*), financial risks (*will the purchase of the product have possible financial consequences?*) and time risks (*will the purchase or use of the product be time consuming?*) (Mpinganjira *et al.*, 2013; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Due to the financial and social risks connected with household equipment purchases it is regarded as medium to high-risk purchases (Erasmus *et al.*, 2014). However, if consumers find themselves exposed to possible psycho-social risks, such as not meeting the objective standards of their social group, they tend to seek ways in which they can diminish the feeling of being socially deprived (Sharma & Alter, 2012). Accordingly, these momentary moods can drive consumers to engage in compulsive and excessive buying (Zhong & Mitchell, 2012) due to the urgent need to possess certain products (Blackwell *et al.*, 2006), resulting in unplanned or impulse purchases to reduce the level of perceived possible psycho-social risk.

### **Impulse consumption – the origin of financial suppression**

Impulse purchases are described as sudden, unplanned purchases because of strong urges, low cognitive control and accompanying feelings of pleasure and excitement (Billieux *et al.*, 2008; Sharma *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, impulse purchases are driven by the spontaneity and achievement of hedonic goals (i.e. gaining pleasure from purchases) which are circumstantially motivated by factors such as social groups, product features or shopping environments, despite the long-term consequences (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Sharma *et al.*, 2010).

Although impulse purchasing is often regarded as a relaxing and fun means to alleviate one's mood and avoid negative psychological states (for example stress or depression) (Silvera *et al.*, 2008), this behaviour should be reconsidered when consumers engage in impulse purchasing too often. When consumers engage in impulse purchasing on a regular basis due to hedonic motives, this mostly problematic behaviour at times require self-control to avoid the underlying negative emotions and negative

association with subjective well-being (Billieux *et al.*, 2008; Silvera *et al.*, 2008). The heightened emotional state that drove the impulse purchases is commonly followed by buyers' dissatisfaction and regret (Wood, 1998), along with unplanned financial expenditures, financial problems (for example irresponsible use of credit), feelings of guilt or immaturity and a negative reaction from one's social group (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Billieux *et al.*, 2008).

Purchases that are relatively permanent due to a certain choice that was made or uninformed purchase decisions, might result in post-purchase conflict or discomfort about the purchase, which may subsequently result in an unpleasant state of tension (Kassin *et al.*, 2008; Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012). Cognitive dissonance refer to the internal tension or struggle that consumers experience after purchases, for example whether it was a good or bad decision to purchase a certain product, which instigate the regret and guilt that are experienced (Babin & Harris, 2011). Accordingly, consumers might seek explanations for their impulse behaviour and as a result may assign it to some cause (Hoyer *et al.*, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014) in order to justify their impulse purchasing behaviour and lower the associated level of stress experienced.

During purchasing, credit cards are progressively used to easily acquire desired products, but for many consumers their unfulfilling purchases result in burdensome debt when credit card debt silently accumulates to problematic levels (Wood, 1998:295). Financial debt, which is a global phenomenon, carries different material, physiological and social meanings depending on the context in which it occurs (Erasmus & Mathunjwa, 2011; Sweet *et al.*, 2013). As a coping device, debt enables consumers to meet immediate needs regardless of whether it is for necessities, conveniences or luxuries amidst fluctuating economic conditions; but it requires future repayment, usually with interest (Hodson *et al.*, 2014; Clayton *et al.*, 2015; Drentea & Reynolds, 2015). Although debt allows consumers to respond to immediate needs, the burden of overspending and unsecured debt can simultaneously pose significant risks for consumers' long-term financial situation and contribute towards associated stress, which affects mental and physical health (Hodson *et al.*, 2014; Clayton *et al.*, 2015; Drentea & Reynolds, 2015).

This is especially a concern for consumers in urban environments, who are exposed to a wider range of products and higher levels of social pressure. They are more prone to experience a variety of stress-contributing factors in their lifestyles (Wagner & Brath, 2012). With increased urbanisation in South Africa in recent years due to a search for better living conditions, (McKenzie *et al.*, 2013; SAIRR, 2013), it can therefore be expected that higher levels of stress will also be experienced among these urban consumers.

### **Well-being in the South African urban environment**

The urban populations in developing countries such as South Africa is rapidly and continually growing (Tibazarwa *et al.*, 2009). South Africa is regarded by the world bank as an upper middle income country and by various providers of index services as an emerging market (Bank, 2016; Investopedia, 2016). This explains the increasingly wider range of products to which consumers are exposed and which supplement their lifestyles. Consumers from all socio-demographic categories are concerned about status-related factors regarding household items (Erasmus *et al.*, 2011). According to the Living conditions survey of 2014/2015, 82.2% of the R1.72 trillion annual household consumption spend is in urban formal areas in South Africa (STATSSA, 2017). In addition, urban consumers experience globalisation more intensely than consumers who reside in semi-urban and rural parts of the country, due to the increased exposure to advanced technological goods and services and accompanying social pressure (Wener & Evans, 2011; Wagner & Brath, 2012). As a result, this exposure to social pressure – namely to be part of a desired social group by purchasing desirable products – influences urban consumers' well-being on a psychological level in particular (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014; Pandelaere, 2016).

In the culturally diverse South African social environment, the emerging black middle class is regarded as the largest spending group, often referred to as Black Diamonds, with a significant household income increase of 34.5% from 2005 to 2010, followed by Indian consumers (Donaldson *et al.*, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). South African consumers spend approximately 5.1% of their annual income on household equipment. Black middle class consumers – being neither affluent nor poor – spend most of their money on food, clothing and footwear and miscellaneous household products

and services, while white families tend to spend more money on household equipment (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014; Cronje *et al.*, 2016; Lemanski, 2017). The social distribution in South Africa is diverse and unequal, with large numbers of consumers in the lower class and only 29% of consumers constituting the middle class. The latter group attach great meaning to status symbols in supporting their self-perception (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014), with the result that consumers not only purchase products for an identified utilitarian need, but also to satisfy an emotional, socially motivated need (Cronje *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, purchases can contribute towards desired upward social class mobility, adding to increased well-being.

### **The effect of consumption on the well-being of consumers**

Well-being is defined in various ways according to individuals' experiences and perspectives and entails several dimensions, including physical, mental, social, intellectual and spiritual (Bushman, 2011). The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not only the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 2014). From a needs perspective, well-being is described as multidimensional and consisting of the satisfaction of material, emotional, social and physical needs and wants which are all assessed differently and with varying degrees of complexity (Suranyi-Unger Jr, 1981; Gardarsdottir *et al.*, 2009). Well-being furthermore involves various life or non-working related satisfactions which consumers enjoy or experience, such as a sense of satisfaction with their social life, family life, work-related aspects and overall physical health (Danna & Griffin, 1999). The multidimensionality of well-being can thus be described in terms of physical and biological terms (physical health) and as a state of happiness and subjective well-being or satisfaction with life (mental health) which a consumer experiences in a social setting (Suranyi-Unger Jr, 1981; Gibbs, 2004; Bond *et al.*, 2012). Wissing *et al.* (2014) stress the significance of understanding the importance of consumers 'feeling well' and experiencing satisfaction with life or happiness, and also consumers' 'functioning well' and 'living well' within their communities, which is associated with the experience of meaningfulness.

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF CONSUMERS REGARDING CONSUMPTION

As mentioned above, the WHO (2014) defines health in terms of well-being on several levels. However, when focusing on one's satisfaction with life, psycho-social well-being can be viewed from two perspectives, namely hedonic well-being (i.e. feeling well / satisfaction with life) and eudaimonic well-being (i.e. functioning well / experiencing meaning in life) (Keyes *et al.*, 2008; Wissing *et al.*, 2014). Hedonic well-being is concerned with a person's mental health and the overall happiness or extent to which consumers feel good about their life while also being linked to the extent to which they are able to satisfy their needs and desires (Keyes & Annas, 2009; Baumeister *et al.*, 2013). Eudaimonic well-being, on the other hand, is regarded as the extent to which consumers perceive their life to be meaningful and as having the ability to achieve the highest level of self-actualisation and satisfaction in life (Keyes *et al.*, 2008; Delle Fave *et al.*, 2011; Wissing *et al.*, 2014). Eudaimonic well-being is regarded to be more complex than hedonic well-being, but both are culturally and socially influenced and concerned with the consideration of the past and future, along with one's functioning in society (Keyes & Annas, 2009; Baumeister *et al.*, 2013; Baumeister, 2016). These two perspectives are seen to have a positive interdependent relationship (Delle Fave *et al.*, 2011), and should therefore be seen as complementary to each other.

During purchases, consumers' level of happiness is increased (hedonic well-being), although the management of money by considering the future is seen to give a sense of meaningfulness (eudaimonic well-being) as well (Baumeister *et al.*, 2013). Both these perspectives refer to facets of psycho-social well-being and represent peoples' judgments of their quality of life (Keyes & Annas, 2009). Subjective well-being is the personal evaluations of consumers' lives, which are regarded to be cognitive and affective in nature, influenced by one's culture and society and affecting goals and values relating to the meaning in a social environment and to and functioning well within that environment (Diener, 2000). Therefore, consumers' subjective well-being (i.e. how they see their life and their satisfaction with it) influences their spending on hedonic products (products giving feelings of satisfaction) in order to receive positive and pleasurable results from purchases, and accordingly add to affective

(emotional) and cognitive (social connectedness) well-being (Zhong & Mitchell, 2012; Alba & Williams, 2013).

Since the social environment plays an important role in motivating purchases that are often unnecessary or aimed at increasing social recognition and psychological well-being (Wood & Hayes, 2012; Champniss *et al.*, 2015), emotional distress may occur if consumers cannot really afford it (Starcke & Brand, 2012; Clayton *et al.*, 2015). Burdensome debt adds to stress, which lowers physical well-being (Sweet *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, even though impulse purchasing may be used to avoid negative psychological states – such as stress, depression and indecisiveness – or to achieve a feeling of social acceptance based on possession, regular impulse purchasing may indicate potential problems that may negatively affect future overall and psycho-social well-being due to poor decision-making (Silvera *et al.*, 2008; Arnold & Reynolds, 2012; Garðarsdóttir & Dittmar, 2012). The various choices consumers make on a daily basis, such as lifestyle choices, managing of stress and habits, are therefore not only important indicators of psycho-social well-being, but these choices can also influence their physical well-being in terms of general health (Aldana *et al.*, 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2012; Ryff, 2013). Consequently, consumers who find themselves in an urban environment, with exposure to a vast variety of in-store or online products, accompanied by high levels of social pressure, may resort to debt to satisfy their identified immediate needs and desires. Even though such purchases may seem sensible at the time to reduce social-related stress, it often leads to buyers' regret, which adds to lower psycho-social well-being and which may result in depression, anxiety, an inability to make well-thought-through decisions and lower overall physical health. An increase in consumers' awareness of their decision-making styles and consideration of consequences may accordingly contribute to greater coping flexibility and to a better health-related quality of life, especially for people in lower socio-economic contexts (Atal & Cheng, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Consumption is a critical part of consumer behaviour, seeing that consumers are confronted with different decisions regarding product purchases on a daily basis, of which some are strongly socially motivated such as

household equipment. Decision-making does not happen in isolation but is influenced by various factors, such as the social environment, consumers' decision-making styles and consideration of immediate and future consequences of purchases. All these factors are seen to play an important role in the well-being of consumers. Consumers, especially those residing in urban environments, are confronted with more choices and bigger social pressure to conform than semi-urban consumers. Because of this, urban consumers may often engage in unplanned and impulsive purchases of i.e. household equipment to address their need to conform to the standards of social groups. Purchases that are not well managed can result in the misuse of credit and burdensome debt. Unmanageable debt leads to high levels of stress that negatively influence their physical well-being, even though the consumer aimed to increase his or her immediate psycho-social well-being with the purchases of desirable products. Consequently, this connection-focused review addressed the identified gap between consumer decision-making and consumers' psycho-social well-being by combining literature and describing the link between the above-mentioned phenomena, as identified in literature. Literature indicates that there may be correlations between consumer decision-making and psycho-social well-being.

The article should be interpreted in the light of the following limitations. Bias could have occurred during the selection of articles, although the diverse contextual perspectives from authors from different disciplines and research expertise were incorporated to minimise the possibility of perspective bias. Furthermore, this review article was approached with the South African urban environment in mind, even though the scope can be broadened to an international context.

This article aims to stimulate future empirical studies on this subject that would assist in the improvement of the well-being of consumers, especially those living within urban environments, and it forms an integral part of the workforce of a country. If a link between the phenomena can be proven empirically, it would contribute to the development of consumer decision-making profiles, which would be beneficial to the development of training programmes such as employee wellness programmes. These programmes could address consumer education regarding decision-making and psycho-social well-being in order to increase overall well-being and lower rates of

presenteeism in the workplace. Future empirical work would usefully be tested by proposing a bio-psycho-social model to visually illustrate the complexity of how the different constructs influence one another. By applying this model in wellness programmes, consumers might be empowered towards well-informed decision-making that may contribute towards increased future psycho-social well-being. Research in this field would furthermore serve as baseline information for future research, by increasing the understanding in this unexplored field and adding to the literature on this phenomenon.

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