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Keep your eyes on the goal! The impact of consumer goal pursuit on the effectiveness of subtle marketing cues

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Chapter

1

Introduction

“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”

Tony Robbins

Goals (desired end states, cf. Louro, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2007) are often a significant pulling force of consumer behavior. Consumers engage in various daily activities while having multiple goals in the back of their minds. Sometimes, these goals are highly relevant for their current endeavors e.g., the main goal of losing weight is directly correlated with activities such as preparing a healthy meal or exercising. In contrast, goals can also be prominent while activities completely unrelated to them are undertaken e.g., the same goal of losing weight can still be active in their minds while consumers study to pass an upcoming exam or go to a cinema to unwind after a stressful day at work.

This dissertation focuses on the juncture between states of varying motivational intensity (active vs. completed goals; unfulfilled vs. fulfilled desires) during consumer goal pursuit / pursuit of desire and consumer responsiveness to subtle marketing stimuli, such as primes (subtle cues incidentally activating knowledge structures such as trait concepts and stereotypes; Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996) or assortment cues. Such subtle marketing stimuli are embedded in the context, but are at the same time inconspicuous and unobtrusive, mildly steering consumers into specific decisions and choices. Through a specific focus on such varying states, this dissertation pinpoints when and how subtle marketing stimuli are most likely to influence consumer judgment, decision-making, and behavior. While research so far predominantly focused on consumer decision-making driven by the context (e.g., Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss 2002, Spangenberg, Crowley, and Henderson 1996), a more refined picture looking at processing of contextual information through the lens of currently active motivations is still lacking. Therefore, the main contribution of this work is to contextualize previous findings, demonstrating not only when subtle contextual cues (e.g.,

primes, assortment cues) drive consumer decision-making, but also when they fail to shape their decisions. As such, it contributes to the current understanding of the impact of subtle marketing cues on consumer judgment and decision-making in several ways. First, by concentrating on prior desires that consumers can bring to the priming setting, it shows how consumers look at encountered primes through desire-tinted glasses, dismissing the subtle influence of desire-irrelevant primes until the very moment of desire fulfilment. Further, it focuses on the intersection of alternative goals pursued next to shopping and the act of shopping itself. It demonstrates that alternative goals that consumers pursue next to shopping can make consumers impervious to assortment cues (specifically assortment structure—the composition and complexity of assortments; Mantrala et al. 2009) when they are active, whereas upon the completion of alternative goals consumers' receptivity to such subtle marketing cues becomes restored. Moreover, the last empirical chapter belonging to this dissertation presents how monetary losses and gains, more specifically the anticipation or experience thereof, modulate consumer attentional scope, making them either see the forest for the trees or particularly discern the trees rather than be able to see the big picture. Thus, this particular chapter of the dissertation contributes to the literature on attentional tuning (cf., Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010, 2011)—the narrowing or broadening of the scope of attention both on a conceptual and/or perceptual level (Posner and Presti 1987). Figure 1.1 depicts the specific content of each of the empirical chapters of this dissertation and their main focus.

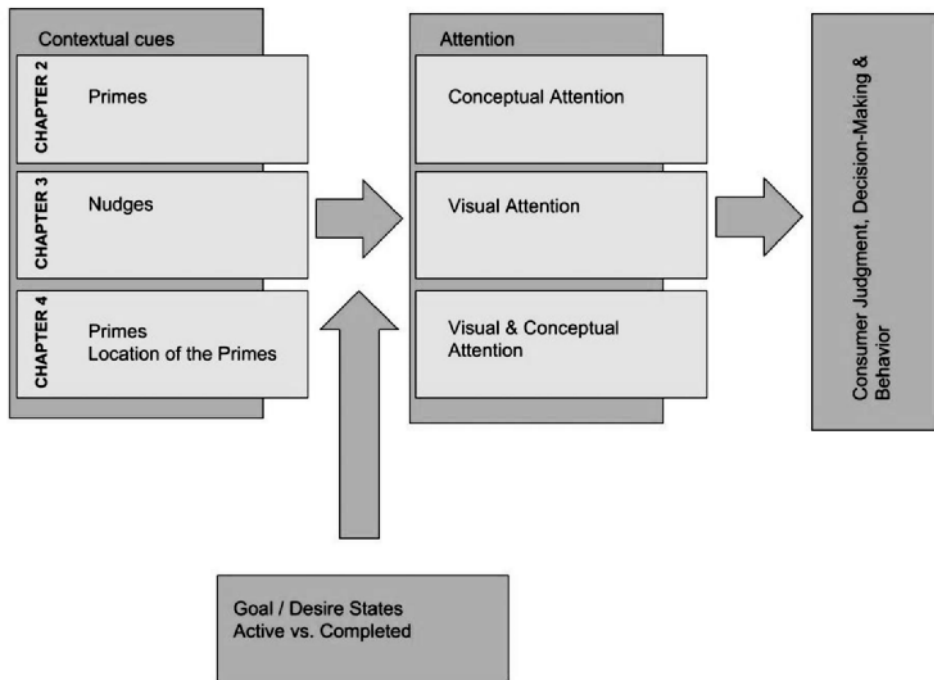


Figure 1.1. The Structure of the Dissertation

Pursued goals vary concerning their motivational intensity; the strength of the tendency to either approach a positive situation or event or, on the contrary, to move away from a negative situation or event (Harmon-Jones, Gable, and Price 2013). Some goals are more desired than others (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999) and, as a result, consumers invest more time, effort, money, and so forth to attain these goals at the expense of the others (Fishbach and Dhar 2005; Shah, Friedman, and Kruglanski 2002). Moreover, sometimes consumers are driven predominantly by their desires, motivational states with an even more short-term and outcome-related focus than goals. This dissertation zooms in on the implications of experienced desires and pursued goals for information processing, therefore it seems indispensable to clearly delineate both concepts. The constructs of desires and goals could be seen as overlapping, nonetheless desire is a much narrower and focused concept.

Desires are primarily colored by associated intrinsic rewards and are higher in affective “hotness”. Following Belk, Ger and Askegard (2003), we define desires as hot, appetitive states characterized by a specific sense of urgency. Both goal pursuit and the pursuit of desire can be further separated into stages of varying motivational intensity. In case of goals we can distinguish active goal pursuit (when goal pursuit is already initiated, but goals have not yet been attained) and goal completion (when goals have already been attained, Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010, 2011). In a similar vein, we can identify unfulfilled-desire states and fulfilled-desire states.

The introduction will sketch the theoretical background against which the propositions presented and empirically tested in this dissertation have been developed. The first section of the introduction concentrates on goal activation and shows how goals become activated in consumer minds and how motivation paves the sequential path towards successful goal attainment. Literature related to goal activation has been used to generate ideas for all three projects of this dissertation. This stream of research helped clarify why intense consumer focus on goals that leads to the inhibition of goal-irrelevant cognitions enhances chances of successful goal pursuit. The literature on activation of goal-relevant knowledge, presented in the following section, is predominantly relevant for the expectations regarding the effectiveness of the priming procedures that are derived in Chapter 2. The theory related to consumer goal pursuit helps to understand the theoretical setting of this dissertation. Despite the fact that this work does not primarily concentrate on consumer goal pursuit, it builds upon the research exploring various facets of it. Insights from these lines of research provided the foundation for developing propositions concerning consumer responsiveness to subtle marketing cues either related to the current goal pursuit (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) or, rather on the contrary, completely unrelated (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). Responsiveness to subtle marketing cues is closely intertwined with the processing of external information and the

research concentrating on attentional tuning (narrowing vs. broadening of attentional scope; Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010, 2011); therefore, consecutive sections dedicate attention to these research streams. Finally, the introduction sketches the picture of a context-driven consumer, the primary research subject, and briefly reviews various findings to date related to contextual effects driving consumer choices.

1.1 Goal Activation

Goals pursued by consumers could be activated either consciously or unconsciously. Conscious goal activation pertains to a deliberate and purposive decision to adopt specific goals and actively pursue them (see Mischel, Cantor, and Feldman 1996, for a review). Nonetheless, the literature on goal activation also highlights the importance of unconscious goal activation through the route of goal priming (e.g., Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, and Trötschel 2001). Research on goal priming emphasizes that mere exposure to any stimulus that has a strong relationship with a specific goal should suffice for activating a desire to attain this particular goal (Bargh and Barndollar 1996). As a result, consumers are, for instance, more likely to shop for higher-priced product options if they were previously presented with prestige-related versus thrift-related words (Chartrand, Huber, Shiv, and Tanner 2008). Further, people become more helpful, hostile, polite, or rude after prior exposure to words related to these specific behaviors (Macrae and Johnston 1998), or they indicate a higher preference for a fun versus a fine dining experience after having seen fun versus impression-related concepts (Laran, Janiszewski, and Cunha 2008).

What specifically distinguishes goal priming from other types of priming effects (semantic priming and procedural priming) is the corresponding underlying motivation to pursue the activated goal and behave in a prime-consistent manner. Semantic priming entails increasing the accessibility of prime-related content in memory and consecutive utilization of this content in a subsequent response (Janiszewski and Wyer 2015). Procedural priming, in

contrast, makes procedural knowledge, related to how things should be done, more accessible. An insightful example of procedural priming is demonstrated by Xu and Wyer (2012). In their studies, participants first had to develop a mindset of counter arguing or bolstering by either disagreeing or agreeing. This initial task further spilled over onto their perception of presented advertisement—previously primed mind-sets were used while evaluating the given advertisement. Goal priming, in contrast to both semantic and procedural priming, has motivational properties and stimulates goal attainment through activating concepts related to a specific goal pursuit (Janiszewski and Wyer 2015). This dissertation, in contrast to a large corpus of previous literature, looks at priming through a relational lens, exploring the connections of primes with currently experienced desires. As such, it concentrates not per se on the content that is primed, but rather on the relationship between this content and experienced desires. Thus, the findings presented in this dissertation could be generalized across all types of priming procedures.

A missing link between goal activation and goal attainment is the construct of motivation—a specific drive that allows consumers to stay on track during their goal pursuit. One of the earliest definitions of motivation proposed by Chaplin (1968) describes it as a set of factors “within the organism which arouse, maintain, and channel behavior toward a goal”. Ferguson (1994), on the other hand, defines motivation as “the internal states of the organism that lead to the instigation, persistence, energy, and direction of behavior”. What comes to the forefront of both presented definitions is not only the directionality but also the specific goal focus characterizing the construct of motivation. Motivation could have differing strengths depending on how desired a specific goal is for an individual. In order to distinguish between more and less desired goals and refine our understanding of goal activation and subsequent goal pursuit and cognitive implications of goal pursuit (e.g., attentional tuning), Gable and Harmon-Jones (2010) explored the concept of motivational intensity—the urge to move

toward or away from a stimulus—closely related to motivation. The goals with the highest motivational intensity are prioritized as the ones that should be attained first.

The concept of goal activation underlies the conceptual development of all of the chapters included in this dissertation. Chapter 2 explores particularly how the activation of short-term goals characterized by the specific sense of urgency—desires—blocks consumer responsiveness to priming procedures that are irrelevant for the currently active pursuit of desire. Chapter 3 takes the perspective of a multiple-goal pursuit, thus the consumer parallel pursuit of two alternative but not inherently incompatible goals. This chapter demonstrates how alternative goals make people less receptive to assortment cues when the alternative goals are active but not when they have been attained. Chapter 4 of this dissertation focuses specifically on the activation of the goals of either gaining additional money or preventing additional losses from happening. It shows how the anticipation versus experience of monetary gains versus losses divergently affects the attentional scope.

1.2 Consumer Goal Pursuit

Following goal activation and in the presence of sufficient motivation driving subsequent actions, consumers embark on their worthwhile goal pursuits. Various goals shape daily lives of consumers. From more routine, habitual goals such as eating something for breakfast or lunch, to more *ad hoc*, spontaneous goals, such as going to the cinema while being bored or meeting a friend, to chronically active goals, such as becoming or staying fit or losing weight, goals could be seen as the very fabric of consumer endeavours. Researchers in the field of consumer behavior have quickly caught up with this relevant topic and recognized the importance of goals for consumers by dedicating numerous research projects to consumer goal pursuit. To illustrate, the words “goal pursuit” next to “self-control” are one

of the most frequently used words in the period of 2004-2014 in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (Wang, Bendle, Mai, and Cotte 2015).

Research on consumer goal pursuit spans across multiple subdomains of the investigation. One of the most populated areas of exploration within the goal pursuit domain concentrates on consumer motivation to attain goals, zooming in on the construct of goal progress (i.e., how far in the goal pursuit consumers are—what has already been done or what still needs to be done in order to attain pursued goals). This dynamic approach to goal pursuit has emerged only recently in both social psychology and consumer behavior literature (Kopetz et al. 2012). The literature on goal progress is still vague concerning how goal progress influences the chances of success in consumer goal pursuit. Initial findings indicated that the further from goal attainment, the higher the motivation is to pursue the goal since the current level of goal progress seems to be very insufficient for successful goal attainment (Fishbach and Dhar 2005; Koo and Fishbach 2008; Koo and Fishbach 2012). In contrast, subsequent research uncovered that greater goal progress boosts rather than undermines chances of goal attainment. Consumers were, for instance, shown to make purchases more frequently when they were closer to a specific end state of a loyalty program (e.g., Kivetz, Urminsky, and Zheng 2006). To further reconcile these inconsistent findings, different moderating variables were proposed to refine our understanding of the relationship between goal progress and goal attainment. Researchers have demonstrated, for instance, that variety among means to attain the goal (Etkin and Ratner 2012), construal level (Fennis and Wiebenga 2013), or goal specificity (Wallace and Etkin 2017) can provide us with a more fine-grained understanding on how goal progress is perceived by consumers and which framing of goal progress (e.g., focus on the initial vs. the end state) can help to get consumers more motivated to pursue their goals. This dissertation builds on previous research exploring the interrelationships between consumer goal progress and their motivation to attain goals. At

the same time, it steps aside from previous findings and takes a more binary perspective on consumer goal pursuit and processing of contextual information. Rather than investigating how goal progress influences consumer perception of subtle marketing cues, three empirical chapters of this dissertation concentrate specifically on whether alternative goals are active or not, or consumer desires have been already fulfilled or still remain unfulfilled.

Another subdomain of investigation within goal pursuit literature focuses specifically on multiple-goal pursuit and tries to grasp how consumers balance between multiple, concurrently active goal pursuits. The pursuit of multiple goals entails constant fine-tuning between opposing demands for a limited pool of resources that consumers can devote to specific goals (e.g., energy, time, effort, cognitive resources; Louro, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2007). The decision to dedicate effort to a particular goal pursuit at the expense of another concurrent one was found to depend not only on the proximity of goal attainment but also specific affective states resulting from the ongoing pursuit. Louro, Pieters, and Zeelenberg (2007) documented that motivation and effort associated with goal pursuit are higher when positive emotions are experienced, and goal attainment is still rather distant. In contrast, when goal attainment becomes near, negative rather than positive emotions are more functional, prompting greater effort towards the focal goal.

Kruglanski et al. (2002) proposed the Goal Systems Theory to clarify how people manage to successfully attain desired goals when multiple goal pursuits are concurrently active. Chapter 3 of this dissertation uses insights derived from the work of Kruglanski et al. (2002) to arrive at more fine-grained expectations related to consumers responsiveness to assortment cues while pursuing multiple goals. The Goal Systems Theory realizes goal pursuit as fundamentally resource-dependent. As a result, during multiple-goal pursuit, various goals compete for a limited pool of resources, and the ones that are characterized by the highest level of commitment attract the most resources. This prioritizing across multiple

goals helps to successfully attain goals that matter the most to the consumer. Shah, Friedman, and Kruglanski (2002) shed more light on multiple-goal pursuit, introducing the notion of *goal shielding*; cognitive inhibition of parallel pursuits for the sake of the most desired one. Through this inhibition, goal conflict arising from the activation of multiple goals does not harm the pursuit of the most desired goals, and they can be successfully attained. Research on multiple-goal pursuit is especially relevant for Chapter 3 of the dissertation. Chapter 3 demonstrates how alternative goals, active next to the shopping goal, render consumers impervious to the subtle influence of assortment cues when they are still being pursued but not upon their completion.

1.3 Goal-Relevant Knowledge and Information Processing

Goal pursuit makes goal-relevant knowledge more accessible when the goals have still not been attained. The stream of research connecting goal pursuit with the accessibility of goal-relevant knowledge started in the 1920s with Bluma Zeigarnik demonstrating that people remember interrupted tasks better than completed ones (Zeigarnik 1927; for reviews, see Butterfield 1964; Heckhausen 1991; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981). Research projects that are more recent extend this perspective showing that goal-relevant knowledge loses its importance when the goal has already been attained, or goal pursuit has not yet been instigated (Fishbach and Ferguson 2007, Balci et al. 2006, Ferguson and Bargh 2004). To illustrate, going for a trip to another country would activate knowledge related to traveling (e.g., concepts such as luggage, passport, plane, relaxation) while concepts unrelated to traveling (e.g., work, chores, projects, tasks) should temporarily lose their salience. Such enhanced accessibility of goal-relevant constructs is functional for goal pursuit since increased accessibility can help in successful goal attainment (Fishbach and Ferguson 2007). Even more interesting is the fact that this activation of goal-relevant constructs can operate without conscious awareness (Moskowitz 2002).

While discussing the connection between goal pursuit and the enhanced accessibility of goal-relevant knowledge, one should not overlook the profound impact of the New Look research movement for developing this line of investigation (McClelland and Atkinson 1948; Bruner 1957; Bruner and Postman 1948; Jones and Thibaut 1958; for a review see Greenwald 1992). In contrast to the traditional view on human perception that proposes that human attention is solely driven by the stimulus itself (Stevens 1951), researchers from the New Look movement took a goal-driven perspective on perception and attention, demonstrating how value associated with the stimulus (thus, for instance, whether it can help or hinder goal pursuit) affects the perception of it. The reality sketched by New Look researchers becomes a *motivated reality* in which currently salient goals and motives turn into a filtering lens through which the world is perceived. The New Look movement has been sparked by a classic and still discussed study of Bruner and Postman (1948) that showed that poor children were overestimating the size of coins to a greater extent than rich children and that this size estimation bias resulted from their greater desire for money. A similar study of Bruner and Goodman (1947) demonstrated another instance of motivated reality, documenting that children are more likely to overestimate the size of coins in comparison with cardboard circles of the same size. A follow-up review of the research conducted by researchers associated with the New Look research movement prepared by Bruner (1957) proposed that the perception of the world is predominantly driven by human needs, wants, and desires and, as a result, it becomes dynamic and malleable over time. Every time the world is seen, various stimuli need to be categorized and, each time, multiple categories are available for this categorization process. Active goals and desires oftentimes determine which specific categories are applied in a particular context and, as a result, how the world is seen. The Post-New Look era in social and consumer psychology brought numerous valuable insights, refining our understanding of the connection between pursued goals and information

processing. Following the New Look research tradition, this dissertation demonstrates how consumers existing in their own motivated realities either are seduced by the subtle influence of contextual cues, or rather on the contrary how they become impervious to such contextual drives. As such, this dissertation also identifies conditions under which consumers become liberated from their contexts and look at the world around them through desire-tinted (Chapter 2) or goal-tinted glasses (Chapter 3 and 4).

People see what they want to see (i.e., what serves their current motivations) when it is possible to justify this goal-serving perception (Balci and Dunning 2006). Balci and Dunning (2006) demonstrated, for instance, that after seeing ambiguous symbols (e.g., 13 that could be interpreted either as letter B or number 13) and being informed that the specific symbol they saw will determine whether they would have a chance to taste a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice or rather a green, foul-smelling organic veggie smoothie, people tended to report seeing a symbol that would help them achieve the more favourable outcome (either B or 13, depending on which symbol was associated with the fresh orange juice). Additionally, current goal pursuit can shape the size of objects that are instrumental in attaining the goal. For instance, when being deprived of fluids, people report a glass of water as being taller in comparison with individuals assigned to a neutral condition (Veltkamp, Aarts, and Custers 2008). Further, people with a throwing goal estimate the basketball to be smaller and the hoop to be bigger in contrast to people without the activated goal of throwing the ball (Den Daas, Häfner, and de Wit 2013). These perceptual biases were further found to have important downstream consequences for the self-control dilemmas of dieters—dieters perceive palatable food as bigger after exposure to a tempting food item while only successful dieters saw diet food as larger after being exposed to the same type of prime. Such differences in perceptual biases between successful and unsuccessful dieters shed more light onto our current understanding of why some people are more persistent in following their diet

than others (Van Koningsbruggen, Stroebe, and Aarts 2011). Next to biases in size perceptions, goal pursuit can also affect the perception of distance. People perceive, for instance, a bottle of water to be closer when they are thirsty and a note of \$100 as less distant if they have a chance to win it (Balcetis and Dunning 2010).

Interestingly, the findings pertaining to the influence of desire on the effectiveness of priming procedures elegantly dovetail with the research on the activation of goal-relevant knowledge. Looking at the desire from the perspective of the Elaborated Intrusion Theory (Kavanagh, Andrade, and May 2005), this dissertation managed to disentangle when the subtle influence of primes guides consumers in their decision-making and when consumer decision-making is left intact after exposure to priming procedures. Desire, specifically when not yet fulfilled, sparks a never-ending loop of desire-related cognitions that interfere with the accessibility and activation of concepts that are not related to the current pursuit of desire and, as a result, has direct implications for the effectiveness of priming procedures.

This dissertation extends the connection between consumer goals and the motivated reality established by the New Look research by highlighting not only the importance of information that is processed as a function of current goal pursuits but also focusing on the information that is dismissed as not aligning with the present underlying motivational drive. As such, it enriches our current understanding of the constant tension between consumers and their environment, showing not only when subtle marketing cues are processed and become consequential for behavior but also when they are foregone.

1.4 Goals and Attentional Scope

Interestingly, goals can also determine the scope of information that is processed at a particular moment in time. In their systematic approach to researching what factors drive the phenomenon of attention tuning—narrowing and broadening one’s attention at both a perceptual and conceptual level (Gasper and Clore 2002)—Gable and Harmon-Jones (2010,

2011) showed that anticipation or attainment of goals can have diverging consequences for attentional processes. While perceptual tuning refers to the broadening or narrowing of the scope of vision and the ability to notice central and peripheral cues present in the environment, conceptual tuning concerns the scope of mental representations in long-term memory (Anderson et al. 1994) and the ability to activate a constricted versus expanded range of memory constructs (i.e., seeing the forest vs. seeing the trees). Earlier work demonstrated predominantly tuning effects as a function of affective valence (e.g., Fredrickson and Branigan 2005). In contrast, more recent work has stressed the role of motivational intensity—the urge to move toward or away from a stimulus with higher intensity producing a narrowing of attentional scope and vice versa (Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010; 2011).

Within this specific line of research, while keeping affective valence constant, Gable and Harmon-Jones (2011) showed that people’s motivational intensity can be manipulated through either the anticipation versus the attainment of monetary rewards. Their research demonstrated that when people expect to win money as a function of task performance, their motivational intensity increases, inducing a narrowed attentional scope. Conversely, when people have already attained the reward, their motivational intensity decreases. As a result, the attentional scope broadens, allowing increased receptivity to stimuli that may signal new opportunities. In addition, the narrowing versus broadening of attentional scope as a consequence of either reward anticipation or attainment holds not only for perceptual but also for conceptual attention (Friedman and Förster 2010).

Interesting insights regarding the dynamic fluctuation of the motivational intensity during goal pursuit could be derived from the research on attentional tuning (Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010; 2011). The dissection of goal pursuit into two fundamental stages, i.e., active goal pursuit when motivational intensity is high and goals have not yet been attained

and goal completion that is characterized by lowered motivational intensity upon goal attainment, is reflected in the theoretical development of the hypotheses across all three empirical chapters constituting the backbone of this dissertation. Additionally, it is also projected in the methodological rigor across experiments presented in the later parts of this dissertation. Essentially, Chapter 2 demonstrates how desire affects processing of priming procedures, relating presented effects to the concept of conceptual tuning since it specifically zooms in on the accessibility of desire-relevant thoughts and cognitions. Chapter 3 departs from the conceptual tuning paradigm and moves towards perceptual tuning, showing the processing of visual configuration of products within assortments, or lack thereof, as a function of concurrent goal pursuit. Chapter 4 connects these perspectives by first investigating the effects of the anticipation versus attainment of monetary gains versus losses on the attentional scope (perceptual tuning) and later expanding towards subsequent spillover effects in the form of both perceptual and conceptual tuning.

1.5 Context-Driven Consumers

Consumer decision-making is deeply embedded in the context. Daily decisions that consumers make as to which specific products to buy and at which supermarket, which particular products to try out and which ones to leave on the shelf, and so forth happen when various subtle contextual cues are inconspicuously present within the scope of consumer vision. Interestingly, the mere exposure to such cues can bias consumer decisions. It has been documented that store design cues and store ambient cues (e.g., music) affect consumer value perception and subsequently shape store patronage intentions (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss 2002), scents present in the retail environment boost purchase intentions (Spangenberg, Crowley, and Henderson 1996), and other subtle contextual cues (i.e., unobtrusively placed mirrors) have a significant impact on customer satisfaction (Pham, Goukens, Lehmann, and Stuart 2010).

There are two basic routes via which subtle marketing cues could affect consumer judgment, decision-making, and behavior. First, consumers could be *primed* towards specific attitudes and behaviors through the enhanced mental accessibility of prime-related concepts that consecutively spill onto specific behaviors. Second, they could be also *nudged* into particular decisions through subtle contextual manipulations such as changes in the order of products on the shelf or the sequence of dishes on the restaurant menu. In this dissertation the influence of both types of subtle marketing cues on consumer decision-making are explored. Additionally, while departing from the basic assumption that consumers do not make their daily decisions in a motivational void, these subtle effects are explored from both desire-centered (Chapter 2) or goal-centered angle (Chapter 3 and 4).

The literature on priming is brimming with surprising and sometimes even counterintuitive examples of how subtle contextual cues can drive consumer behavior. Research documents, for instance, that exposure to pictures of a library can make people speak more softly (Aarts and Dijksterhuis 2003), holding a warm cup of coffee can spill over to perceiving other people as warmer (Williams and Bargh 2008), and being primed with a concept of professor can boost performance on general knowledge test (Dijksterhuis et al. 1998). Interestingly, also mere exposure to purely marketing stimuli such as logos, brand names, or colors of products can prime specific behavioral outcomes. Consumers were, for example, shown to be driving either faster or more recklessly in a racing game after having been exposed to Red Bull logo (vs. Coca-Cola logo) (Brasel and Gips 2011), they were willing to spend less money after seeing such brand names as Walmart or Dollar Store (Laran, Dalton, and Andrade 2011), while they were more likely to prefer Sprite (vs. Fanta) after having been given a green (vs. orange) pen (Berger and Fitzsimons 2008). Also, not only visual stimuli could act as primes. Consumers could be primed also by auditory stimuli, such as music (North, Hargreaves, and McKendrick 1999), bodily stimuli, such as hardness

or softness (Möller and Herm 2013) or perceived weight (Zhang and Li 2012), and olfactory stimuli, such as citrus-scented all-purpose cleaner (Holland, Hendriks and Aarts 2005). Despite the heterogeneity of priming effects across studies (e.g., Strick et al. 2011), a recent meta-analysis conducted on a plethora of priming effects corroborates their robustness, emphasizing their subtlety at the same time (Weingarten et al. 2016).

Traditional models explaining why and how priming effects come about take a predominantly static perspective on priming, demonstrating which specific stimuli enhance the mental accessibility of prime-related constructs, shaping subsequent judgment, decision-making, and behavior (Collins and Loftus 1975). The core process that explains when priming occurs proposed by this more passive perspective on priming is spreading activation. Primes affect judgment, decision-making, and behavior because they increase the accessibility of prime-related constructs in semantic memory and simultaneously activate constructs related to the specific prime. In addition, not only the associated nodes in semantic memory are activated through the process of spreading activation but also the links between them. Thus, priming with a specific colour (e.g., blue, Mehta and Zhu 2009) not only activates accessibility of other colours, specifically ones that are closely related, but also the links (i.e., relationships) between them (the whole semantic category of ‘colors’; Collins and Loftus 1975).

The second chapter of this dissertation expands this static perspective, implementing a more flexible, incessantly fluctuating perspective on priming effects. Looking at priming through a ‘constructionist’ lens (Fujita and Trope 2014; Loersch and Payne 2011; Wheeler, DeMarree, and Petty 2007), Chapter 2 takes into account preceding desires (hot, appetitive states; Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003) that oftentimes accompany consumers in their daily lives and could precede exposure to primes. In this way, it illustrates not only when desire facilitates priming effects for desire-relevant primes, but also when it interferes with desire-

irrelevant priming effects when desire has not yet been fulfilled. In contrast, following desire fulfillment, desire-relevant primes lose their focal for desire pursuit function and lose their importance. At the same time, desire fulfillment facilitates the occurrence of desire-irrelevant priming effects. In essence, the second chapter of this dissertation addresses one of the major opportunities in priming research identified by Janiszewski and Wyer (2014) in their systematic review focusing predominantly on content and process priming effects—*anti-priming*—interference of priming effects. While a large body of research to date focuses primarily on the prime-behaviour link, while also trying to pinpoint when assimilation or contrast effects occur (e.g., Herr, Sherman, and Fazio 1983; Lombardi, Higgins, and Bargh 1987; Martin, Seta, and Crelia 1990), only a limited number of research projects concentrated predominantly on factors that could attenuate the accessibility of prime-related concepts. The notable exception within this particular research stream investigating anti-priming is the recent work of Dong and Lee (2017), who demonstrated how the embodied experience of physical cleansing can act as a psychological barrier between the primed goal and subsequent behavior, diminishing mental accessibility of previously primed goals. The second chapter contributes to this line of research on priming effects, showing how prior desires brought to the priming setting could either make the priming effects to surface or keep them suppressed.

A *nudge*, following Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008), is ‘any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives’. As such, an organization of products on the shelves in the supermarkets or rearranging food options in the restaurants are seen as examples of *nudging* people into making specific choices. Often, nudging is used to improve consumer decision-making and seamlessly steer consumers towards making better, healthier choices that would benefit their long-term well-being. The third chapter of this dissertation could be particularly tied to a specific category of tools that often function as

nudges—changes in the physical environment (Lehner, Mont, and Heiskanen 2016). One very prominent retail practice that uses nudging to attract consumer attention to specific products in the retail environment is a simple practice of situating products at eye level (Dreze, Hoch, and Purk 1994). Additionally, locating products close to cashiers also helps boost their sales (Goldberg and Gunasti 2007). Recent research in the field of product location and consumer decision-making investigates how varying the location of specific products in the supermarkets could nudge consumers into making healthier choices. Romero and Biswas (2016) demonstrate, for instance, how presenting a healthy option to the left (vs. right) of the unhealthy option enhances consumer preferences for the healthy item. Along the same research line, Keller, Markert, and Bucher (2015) show how positioning a healthy snack in the middle of three given options makes consumers select it more often.

The third chapter of this dissertation concentrates specifically on consumer decision-making driven by assortment cues. Building upon research on multiple-goal pursuit (Louro, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2007), it demonstrates when consumers become responsive to assortment cues (e.g., assortment structure—an organization of products within assortments) and when consumer responsiveness to such cues becomes attenuated as a result of pursuing concurrent, alternative goals. As such, the third chapter of this dissertation provides marketers and decision-makers with a more fine-grained, fluid perspective on consumer behavior as a function of the context within which consumer decisions are made.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation builds specifically on how consumer goals, particularly obtaining gains or averting loss, shape consumer attentional scope and subsequent effectiveness of priming effects. As such, the fourth chapter contributes not only to our current understanding of factors that affect either narrowing or broadening of attentional scope (attentional tuning, Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010, 2011), but also to

clarifying how these changes in attentional scope influence consecutive goal pursuit and susceptibility to priming procedures.

The current dissertation builds upon previous research on the connection between goal pursuit and information processing, aiming at uncovering how goal pursuit shapes consumer responsiveness to subtle marketing cues. Each chapter of the dissertation concentrates on the specific, broadly researched domain from consumer research, providing a more fine-grained understanding of consumer susceptibility to subtle marketing cues. Three empirical chapters that constitute the backbone of this dissertation contribute to consumer research by showing not only when consumers fall prey to the subtle influence of their environment but also by highlighting when such subtle effects are inhibited, leaving consumer decision-making intact. In the following section, the main consumer phenomena constituting the backbone of this dissertation are briefly presented. Additionally, this section concentrates specifically on the primary contribution to current knowledge in the field of consumer behavior that each of the chapters makes.

1.6 Overview of the Dissertation

CHAPTER 2. Primes

Both consumer research and social psychology are replete with examples of subtle activation of concepts in people's minds (priming) through exposure to subtle contextual cues that can have a profound impact on subsequent judgment, decision-making, and behavior. For instance, ceiling height influences how consumers process information (Meyers-Levy and Zhu 2007), exposure to pictures of money makes people more self-sufficient (Vohs, Mead, and Goode 2006), whereas touching hard objects increases rigidity in negotiations (Ackerman, Nocera, and Bargh 2010).

The broad scope of research findings to date demonstrates specifically what happens at the prime exposure stage, a moment in time when people are unobtrusively exposed to priming stimuli, largely disregarding prior motivations that consumers can bring to the priming setting (Légal et al. 2012). The second chapter of the dissertation zooms in on the stage preceding the prime exposure stage and provides a more realistic and malleable perspective on priming effects. It concentrates specifically on a concept of consumer desire—the hot, appetitive state that is permeated with often irrepressible impatience to obtain what one desires (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003). Desire pervades in daily consumer lives. From daily, small objects of desire such as dessert, lemonade on a hot day, or rest through more fundamental, biological desires such as eating when hungry to the ones that are constantly created by creatives in advertising agencies such as buying the newest edition of an iPhone or a new suit from Hugo Boss; desire adds colour and various shades of longing to our daily undertakings. Due to motivational properties characterizing desire—the intense drive to obtain desired objects, sometimes even irrespective of consequences—research has already demonstrated the prominent influence of desire on human cognition (Kavanagh, Andrade, and May 2005). Since desire sparks desire-centered cognitions, it is hypothesized and empirically demonstrated that desire-relevant information would be prioritized in contrast to desire-irrelevant information but only when desire has not yet been fulfilled. These expectations should be particularly relevant for priming due to the fact that priming, as alluded to above, happens in an unobtrusive, subtle, and sometimes even fully unconscious, manner.

As a result of these expectations, the second chapter demonstrates across four studies that desire-relevant primes influence consumer decision-making when desire is still active and unfulfilled; thus in the ‘unfulfilled’ rather than ‘fulfilled’ desire state. In contrast, desire-irrelevant primes were found to only impact consumers who have already fulfilled their other,

concurrently activated desires. The second chapter provides a more dynamic perspective on how priming operates by focusing on a constant tension between inner motivations of consumers and subtle marketing cues that are brimming with meanings and evoking various associations. Through concentrating not only on facilitating but also inhibiting factors influencing priming effectiveness, the second chapter demonstrates what Janiszewski and Wyer (2014) termed as ‘anti-priming’ in their seminal paper, which indicates not only when priming procedures work but, additionally, uncovering when they fail to work.

CHAPTER 3. Nudges

Contextual cues, which are constantly present in consumer lives, do not always convey specific meanings that could make particular concepts in consumer minds more accessible and subsequently guide their judgment, decision-making, and behavior. It frequently happens that contextual cues influence consumers in an unobtrusive way due to their visual organization making them, for instance, choose some products over other ones. In this way they act as nudges, steering consumers towards specific choices or preventing them from making other ones. Numerous examples from consumer research demonstrate how consumers become context-driven. For instance, consumers perceive products located near products eliciting even only moderate levels of disgust (e.g., feminine napkins) as contaminated and, as a result, are less likely to purchase those (Morales and Fitzsimons 2007), or they evaluate products as a function of the flooring that they walk on (Meyers-Levy, Zhu, and Jiang 2009).

Additionally, the visual organization of products on shelves could nudge consumers into selecting particular products with a greater likelihood by shifting their product preference closer to the center or to the edge. Bar-Hillel (2015) tries to reconcile previous puzzling findings concerning consumer preferences for specific product locations, arguing that the structure of an assortment determines whether consumers prefer a product located either

closer to the center or closer to the edge. She distinguishes two types of assortments in her conceptual investigation: evidently equivalent assortments (composed of products varying only in a few attributes) and non-equivalent assortments (composed of products varying in numerous attributes). She demonstrates that consumers are more likely to select products closer to the center of an assortment when they choose products from evidently equivalent assortments while non-equivalent assortments shift consumer preferences closer to the edge.

The third chapter of the dissertation shows how shopping-independent, alternative goals (e.g., winning money) interfere with processing of shopping-related information (i.e., assortment cues, specifically assortment structure), rendering consumers impervious to the influence of subtle marketing cues. It builds on both the Goal Systems Theory (Kruglanski et al., 2002) and the phenomenon of goal shielding to demonstrate that, when alternative goals are active, the influence of assortment cues on consumer decision-making is inhibited. As a result, assortment structure does not nudge consumers into specific product choices. In contrast, when alternative goals have already been attained, consumers open up to the broader range of contextual information and become more receptive to it. Consequently, they ‘fall prey’ to the subtle nudge of their context. More specifically, they tend to select products located closer to the center of evidently equivalent assortments whereas, in the case of non-equivalent assortments, they shift their product preferences closer to the edge.

CHAPTER 4. Primes and Their Location

The fourth chapter of this dissertation concentrates on two specific goals related to money: either gaining money or preventing monetary losses from happening. As in previous chapters, it focuses on specific states in consumer goal pursuit induced by either monetary gains or losses, i.e., anticipation or experience, exploring their connection with the attentional scope and information processing. Building on previous research investigating the phenomenon of attentional tuning—broadening or narrowing of attentional scope (Gable and

Harmon-Jones 2010; 2011), it replicates prior findings concerning monetary gains and demonstrates that the attentional scope narrows when monetary gains are anticipated, but it broadens when monetary gains have already been attained. Nonetheless, the main contribution of this research project lies on the side of monetary losses rather than monetary gains, showing that attentional tuning looks different for losses in comparison with gains. In the loss anticipation state, when losses have not yet been experienced, attentional scope broadens. In contrast, attentional scope narrows in the loss experience state. This finding underscores the qualitative difference between gains and losses and the significant consequences that experience of losses has for human cognition.

Together, the empirical chapters contain ten studies demonstrating decision-making of context-driven and at the same time goal-driven or desire-driven consumers. The last chapter will provide a summary and discussion of the empirical results presented in the previous chapters with a specific focus on both theoretical and practical implications of the dissertation. All empirical chapters address the overarching theme of context-driven consumer behaviour as a function of salient motivations resulting either from pursued goals or experienced desires. Nonetheless, they can also be read in isolation since they function also as separate papers. This fact has implications for possible overlap in the definitions and descriptions of critical constructs across chapters.