

Exploring the Role of Social Motives in the Enjoyment of Consumption

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Objective

The objective of the present research is two-fold. First, we explore the relationship between social needs and the enjoyment of consumption experience and, second, identify potential mediators of this relationship.

Significance

A crucial task retailers face when designing distribution systems is determining the optimal number of physical stores. Part of the answer lies in the benefits that this type of outlet delivers to consumers. Physical locations offer several advantages, among them direct evaluation of items, instant availability and opportunity to socially interact, which is the focus of the present study. Research shows that consumers enjoy shopping and consuming with others (Borges et al. 2010, Arnold & Reynolds 2009) in part because companionship enhances perceptions of hedonic, functional and social value (An & Han 2020). Research also shows though that the enjoyment of companionship is diminished during consumption as compared to non-consumption activities (Mora 2022). All else being equal, as commercial locations substitute for public spaces (parks, boulevards) as loci for social interaction in large cities, collective well-being should be expected to diminish. A better understanding of what drives enjoyment of companionship during consumption at retail locations, as well as the individual differences in responses to those drivers, may point to avenues to further collective well-being in urban areas. In the present research, we explore the role of fundamental social motives, specifically affiliation need, need for independence and fear of exclusion (Neel et al. 2016) in predicting the enjoyment of consumption experiences. As they drive social behavior, we expect social motives to predict enjoyment of consumption experiences.

Method

We conducted an online survey on a random sample of individuals living in the USA on the M-Turk platform. A total of 372 respondents were asked to report their participation in four consumption activities in the previous week, their level of enjoyment of each activity, whether they were by themselves or with others, and the estimated time spent. The activities were eating at restaurants, watching TV, shopping for groceries and shopping for clothing. Respondents also completed the social motives instrument (Neel et al. 2016). The data set is unbalanced as observations per individual varied from one to four. The resulting sample size is N=901.

We model self-reported enjoyment on demographic and social motive predictors. We specify this model as random intercepts and random slopes, with observations grouped by individual. Random intercepts account for differences in individual tendencies to enjoy these specific activities, while random slopes account for heterogeneous responses to drivers of enjoyment across individuals (e.g. age may have stronger effects on enjoyment in some individuals and weaker effects in others).

Results

Total sample estimates: Table 1 shows that model 2, with covariates for social motives, has better fit than model 1 (benchmark). Affiliation need has the largest estimate among social motives, consistent with consumption settings doubling as social interaction loci, followed by independence need, as willingly participating in consumption activities to address one's needs may reinforce self-perceived independence. Fear of exclusion has a negative and significant estimate, but modest in comparison to the other two.

The estimates for social context, ethnicity and gender are substantially smaller in model 2 respect to model 1, implying that differences in social needs account for most of the differences across levels in each of those covariates. Both ethnicity and gender are potential segmentation variables, whereas social

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context is central to our inquiry on social motives and enjoyment. Therefore, we decided to estimate model 2 in subsamples by levels of ethnicity x social context, and gender x social context.

Estimates by subsample: Following the analytical strategy above, we generated four subsamples: 1. non-White participants reporting being in a group (N=145) and solo (N=126) during the activity; 2. White participants in a group (N=346) and solo (N=284); 3. female participants in a group (N=216) and solo (N=137); and, 4. male participants in a group (N=275) and solo (N=273). Model 2 was estimated on each of these subsamples.

Figure 1 presents the estimates of interest for ethnicity x social context. We point to three important findings. First, fear of exclusion reduces enjoyment among non-White participants, especially when consuming solo, but have no effects among White participants. This contrast may stem from social comparison playing a more important role in individuals with collectivistic orientation (non-White) compared to those with individualistic orientation (White).

The second finding involves independence need, which positively affects enjoyment among non-Whites who are in a group, and among Whites who are solo. This contrast may indicate differences in how individual identity is construed: through group affiliation in more collectivistic cultures, as opposed to self-reliance in more individualistic cultures. The third finding concerns affiliation need, which for Whites has similar estimates across social contexts. For non-Whites though the estimate is around 50% larger in the solo respect to the group condition, perhaps indicating a stronger desire to affiliate with the outgroup (e.g. other customers at the store) than with their own in-group.

The differences in estimates by gender and social context are less pronounced and are not presented here. We find the affiliation need estimate to be twice as large in female vs. male respondents, regardless of context. Also, female respondents are strongly motivated by independence need in solo social context, i.e. the estimate is twice as large than for females in groups and four time larger than for males in any context.

Conclusions/Relevance

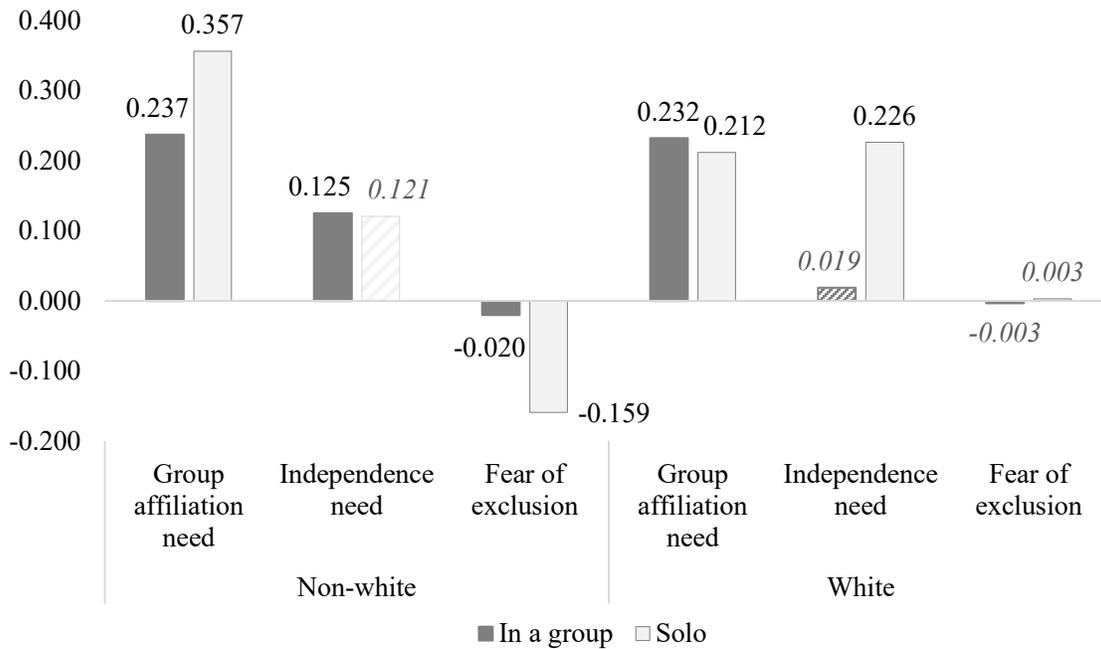
We find that social motives predict enjoyment of consumption. This effect varies across levels of culture (ethnicity) and, to a lesser degree, gender by social context. These findings, pending further research, may have strategy and policy implications. For instance, promotional campaigns could help non-White individuals who must eat out on workdays better enjoy the experience, for instance, by presenting clues that prime affiliation (which boost their enjoyment of solo consumption) and/or counter fear of exclusion (which hampers enjoyment while solo). This sort of application should motivate the interest of policy makers who, more than just satisfied customers, aim for a happier citizenry.

Table 1

DV: Enjoyment N=901		Model 1	Model 2
	AIC	2,309	2,210
Consumption	At restaurants	1.046	1.002
	Watching TV (Base: Shopping)	0.861	0.800
	Social context (in a group vs. solo)	0.233	0.014
	Time spent on the activity	0.005	0.004
Social motives	Affiliation need		0.254
	SD of individual estimates		0.027
	Independence need		0.137
	SD		0.044
	Fear of exclusion		-0.048
	SD		0.040
Demographics	Female	-0.027	-0.175
	SD	0.730	0.244
	Age	0.006	0.008
	SD	0.014	0.011
	Ethnicity (Non-white)	0.234	-0.013
	SD	0.037	0.357
	College	0.036	-0.017
	SD	0.245	0.252
Intercept	Estimate	3.101	1.659
	SD	1.594	2.960

Note: All estimates are significant with $p < .01$. Base case Shopping consolidates groceries and clothing.

Figure 1



Legend: Non-significant estimates ($p > .05$) have data labels in light *italics* and columns in patterned filling.