

THE PURSUIT OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND THE COMPLEXITY OF CONSCIENTIOUS CONSUMER DECISION MAKING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WHITE GOODS INDUSTRY: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Emerging economies value an increasing GDP since it symbolises economic growth. South Africa's GDP increase has in part stemmed from the consumption patterns of consumers who have since 1994 been awarded equal opportunities and thus have been able to join the ranks of an emerging middle class consumer segment. However, current global trends established that the population's consumption practices already exceed Earth's bio-capacity by 50%. In this regard the question remains whether consumption should be encouraged, especially in emerging economies such as South Africa where economic growth is much needed. Current literature does not adequately address this question, yet experts suggest that economic, environmental and social well-being needs to be considered to ensure the sustainability of natural resources. These are the resources that will support consumption on a national level, satisfy human needs on a personal level and maintain the integrity of natural reserves for future generations. Since consumption of products has a direct and indirect impact on the well-being of both the individual and the larger population, consumers also have a responsibility to improve consumer choices thereby reducing the nation's social imbalance. Although macro level intervention is important, consumers (particularly those who belong to the higher-income groups), should also make conscientious decisions that may elicit economic, environmental and social responsibility as a measurement of well-being instead of maintaining the prevailing hedonic treadmill. White goods serve as a typical example of products that require more conscientious deliberation. These products are deemed objects of affluenza, but simultaneously bear long term economic and environmental implications due to their required energy and water consumption. Based on the aforementioned arguments, this theoretical review proposes a unique conceptual framework that includes the pursuit of subjective well-being amidst the interplay of various constructs such as relative deprivation and affluenza to guide future research endeavours

in achieving deeper insight into the complexity of conscientious consumer decision making in the South African white goods industry.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, concepts such as "Green Economy", "Sustainability" and "Growth Transition" were introduced to promote a holistic approach that extends beyond mere economic progression to include broader environmental and social concerns. Adopting such an approach is, however, not exempt from problems. Modern societies have created a culture where consumption beyond the point of need has

become commonplace (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:6-7). This overconsumption may even be encouraged in emerging economies such as South Africa, since it is viewed as a reflection of the country's development that is mirrored in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). Despite a contraction in the first quarter of 2016 (Trading Economics, 2016), South Africa's overall GDP for 2012-2016 was above the world average rate (SA News, 2015a), which in part stemmed from consumption increases among the emerging middle class consumer segment (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2012). Unfortunately, consumption and progress that are exclusively based on economic principles (as reflected in the GDP) often trigger unsustainable practices and exert undue pressure on a country's natural capital (Rogers & Ryan, 2001).

While debates continue among academia, government and other stakeholders about the relevance of the GDP and increased consumption, questions pertaining to individual households' perspectives and approach to environmentally responsible practices remain a key issue in the quest for a sustainable future. Although political efforts are imperative, public support (at individual household level) is equally important to halt further environmental deterioration (World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF), 2012). A typical example of household practices that have several environmental repercussions in addition to economic and social implications is the use of household appliances (also referred to as white goods). Coinciding with South Africa's growing middle class segment came the escalation of appliance sales and the overall growth of the white goods industry (PwC, 2012). In addition to appliances that are bought for the first time, replacement sales have also increased since technological progress is rendering appliances out-dated much sooner than previously experienced (McCollough, 2009). The reality is that as more appliances are manufactured and sold, the more natural resources are expended (Cooper, 2005).

Globally, various environmental interest groups emphasise the severity of natural resource depletion (WWF, 2012), which warrants greater sensitivity toward the environment in all consumption spheres including the white goods industry. In South Africa, declining water reserves (Sadr et al, 2015) and the prevailing energy crisis (Inglesi-Lotz, 2011) merit particular concern. Current water and energy shortages

should motivate South Africans to make conscientious decisions regarding the consumption of white goods, more specifically because appliance purchases have several implications. There are consequences not only for consumers': (1) economic well-being, i.e. long term financial commitments for the household (Erasmus et al, 2005) and (2) social well-being, i.e. consumption decisions shape and maintain a person's self-identity and social status (Jackson, 2005), but also for their (3) environmental well-being, i.e. white goods require resources such as water and energy that impact on the environment (Cabeza et al, 2014).

Despite the relevance of environmental concerns, promoting conscientious decision making and the overall well-being of all South African citizens require consideration of aspects that extend beyond the environmental perspective. Other factors come into play that may ultimately impact on an individual's decision to act beyond the goal of immediate gratification for the greater good of the environment. As an example, many South Africans may be prone to a sense of economic and social deprivation, which have lead them to believe that they do not have what they deserve relative to their reference groups (Wickham et al, 2014). They may consequently engage in future discounting practices whereby they value immediate rewards over the broader long term consequences of their decisions (Wilson & Daly, 2004), e.g. a consumer chooses to purchase a cheaper washing machine with high energy and water consumption to satisfy immediate needs, rather than saving for a more expensive model that requires less energy and water over the long term.

With the above arguments in mind, this paper offers a review of current theoretical insights that further delve into the complexity of conscientious consumer decision making with the purpose of proposing a conceptual framework that could guide future research endeavours in the South African white goods industry. To date, existing theories mainly focus on social-psychological constructs such as values, attitudes, and beliefs to explain consumers' willingness to engage in conscientious decision making (Jackson, 2005). In contrast, the conceptual framework presented in this paper is the first to integrate the complex interplay of constructs such as the pursuit of subjective well-being, in addition to affluenza (prevalent overconsumption), relative deprivation and future discounting that may offer

a unique and novel perspective on the contextual reality of consumers' conscientious decision-making in the local white goods industry.

UNDERSTANDING THE BROADER CONTEXT AND ALTERNATIVE MEASURES FOR PROGRESS AND WELL-BEING

The almost-universal GDP measure, as a determinant of progress, has been widely used as a tool to guide policy making (Costanza et al, 2009). South Africa, as an emerging economy, values an increasing GDP since it symbolises economic growth that is manifested in the production, acquisition and consumption of goods (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). Globally, in 2008, it was already established that humanity's consumption practices exceed Earth's biocapacity by 50%. South Africa, along with other emerging economies (e.g. Brazil, India and China), has the alarming potential to further increase consumption to such a point that humanity's ecological footprint far exceeds Earth's regenerative capacity, thus compromising the well-being of future generations (WWF, 2012; 2014). Since the GDP excludes environmental and social dimensions of well-being, Kuznets (1934), as the chief architect of the GDP, warned governments against using it as an exclusive measure of a nation's welfare.

To the extent that the GDP fails to determine a nation's well-being beyond mere economic prosperity (Commission of the European Communities, 2009), alternative multidimensional measures such as the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index have been introduced by, for instance, Bhutan in order to determine the true progress and wealth of the country and its people (Centre for Bhutan studies, 2012). A dimension of the GNH index that is synonymous with sustainable development (Ura et al, 2012), is the 'non-declining level of well-being for future generations' as defined by Hanley (*in* Talberth et al, 2006:4). Sustainable development and the well-being of future generations encompass economic, environmental and social components and imply that consumers' current needs must be met whilst considering long term sustainable consumption. That consumption is therefore a core issue in the quest for sustainable development was first conceded by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, and then by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, followed by the subsequent World Summit on Sustainable

Development in 2002 and more recently the 2012 United Nation's Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development *in* Talberth et al, 2006).

Recent Living Planet reports (WWF, 2012, 2014) indicate that the South African population is exhibiting consumption patterns that are indicative of industrialised countries, notwithstanding high levels of income inequality (PwC, 2012) and extreme variations of living standards that characterise most emerging economies (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006). Empirical evidence further suggests that a small percentage of South African consumers are accountable for a substantial percentage of the overall consumption of the country (Bhorat & Hirsch, 2013; Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Rosenberg, 2006). This highly skewed consumption pattern might be attributed to emerging middle class consumers' aspirations of material wealth and possessions (PwC, 2012). In addressing the question why people consume more than needed for existence or comfort, Chancellor and Lyubomirsky (2011) as well as Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2012), concluded that they do so to seek happiness.

In relation to people's pursuit of happiness, the GNH Index is of particular interest since it orientates a nation and its citizens towards happiness by improving the conditions of those who have not yet attained appropriate levels of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) (Ura et al, 2012). The GNH determines a country's overall SWB by including economic prosperity in addition to other important determining factors such as achieving the goals of sustainability. More importantly, it also considers individual citizens and their personal level of SWB as part of a country's national index (Centre for Bhutan studies, 2012; Talberth et al, 2006). In summary, the GNH Index is based on the fact that the pursuit of happiness and well-being is unattainable through an exclusive focus on economic progress and material consumption, which is unfortunately evident in many of our societies (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). This constant pursuit of economic progress and the associated epidemic of overconsumption have gained much interest in recent years and termed 'Affluenza' by Hamilton and Denniss (2005:3).

AFFLUENZA: AN UNHEALTHY PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Due to the global financial crisis, challenges for

maintaining economic certainty and growth have been experienced both at governmental and individual level. Households are now expected to undertake their own long-term financial success (Hira, 2012), which implies that they need to consider the long-term financial repercussions of their decisions. Hamilton and Denniss (2005:4-5) explain that in order to become economically wealthy, individuals must ease the burden of economic anxiety, i.e. individuals' concern for economic crashes or prolonged recession (Investor guide.com, n.d.). Unfortunately, as the income of a country and its affluent consumers grow, it often creates a greater concern for wealth. The authors termed this phenomenon "affluenza" and define it as an unsustainable addiction to economic prosperity that results in "un-fulfilment". Affluenza is closely associated with materialism, because affluent consumers frequently become even more materialistic regardless of the amount of money or possessions they accumulate (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:5).

Materialism is seen as the value a consumer assigns to the acquisition and possession of material objects. Highly materialistic people believe that well-being can be enhanced through their associations with possessions, although this concept has been disproven since such individuals tend to be less happy and more dissatisfied with life (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Materialism may therefore have severe negative connotations (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Despite the negative consequences of materialism and the accumulation of possessions, consumers who appear to have materialistic inclinations seem unable to change their behaviour (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011).

A contributing factor to materialism and overconsumption is a failure to distinguish between wants and needs (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:6-7). People inevitably compare their situations with those of their peers and the affluent compare their well-being with that of those who have a higher social standing, which may inevitably result in expectations (wants) that cannot be met with the current level of income or possessions. Since the threshold of sufficiency is constantly being raised, a so-called hedonic treadmill is established (Costanza, 2008; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). This treadmill facilitates overspending, borrowing and indebtedness associated with the frivolous pursuits of unattainable aspirations (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011). According to

Binswanger (2003) people are encouraged to keep on raising their aspirations to higher levels and to be constantly dissatisfied with their current status. These aspirations should be made known to others in order to negate the idea of a person having low ambitions. This can in turn be associated with the outward display of wealth. The visible display of covetable possessions was first labelled as conspicuous consumption by Thorstein Veblen (Veblen, 1899) and it relates to a conscious display of status and wealth by the rich to evoke a sense of awe amongst others (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:8). This type of behaviour has sparked considerable interest among researchers over the past decades, but the central question remains whether it truly enhances the SWB and individual happiness of human beings.

QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF AN INDIVIDUAL

Societies, including South Africa, are continuously striving to improve their Quality of Life (QOL), which serves as a measure to increase the welfare of individuals. QOL, in its true sense, should be associated with economic prosperity and sustainability, but instead has often been associated with the assumption that more income and increased consumption leads to improved welfare (Caporale et al, 2009). This assumption has been challenged (e.g. Diener, 2000; Easterlin, 2006), which in turn has led to the development of alternative measures of welfare and QOL (Costanza, 2008). SWB relates to a person's evaluation of the overall quality of their life, in a manner that is favourable (Diener, 2000) and thus correlates to QOL.

Diener (1994) offers the description of SWB as (1) a personal experience related to an individual, (2) an encompassing measurement that includes (3) positive measures in addition to the absence of negative aspects. Seligman et al, (2005) suggest that people differ in their pursuit of well-being and what they regard as happy, but that happy people are generally healthier, more successful and more socially engaged than people who are not as happy. A distinction should, however, also be made between hedonic and eudaimonic pursuits of SWB. *Eudaimonia* refers to a way of living that focuses on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings, based on certain intrinsic values (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to the Self-determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan et al, 2006), a person who engages in meaningful endeavours, i.e. eudaemonic

pursuits, will experience an enduring sense of SWB and consistently high levels of life satisfaction. Yet, SDT recognises that non-eudaemonic activities can also lead to SWB. As explained by Ryan et al, (2006), hedonic activities (e.g. consuming excessively), may not be eudaemonic, but may still lead to SWB in the short run, i.e. *eudaimonia* leads to a prolonged sense of SWB, whereas *hedonia* has more temporary effects (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan et al, 2006). This distinction is important as it may relate to an individuals' willingness to consider the future consequences of their consumption. Consumers who exhibit an eudaemonic approach in their pursuit of SWB are more inclined to demonstrate socially responsible actions (Ryan et al, 2006).

The resulting argument brought forward in this review is that similarly to measuring a nation's well-being beyond economic progress, a more comprehensive measurement should be undertaken to determine a person's SWB beyond financial prosperity. A measure of SWB (in relation to the underlying hedonic or eudaimonic pursuits) may have much to say about individuals' perspectives and approach to sustainable lifestyles and practices. If a society maintains sustainable consumption on a national level, it will promote the satisfaction of human needs, the equitable distribution of resources while maintaining the integrity of natural resources of the country amongst other aspects. Furthermore, individually, it has been established that a positive relationship exists between sustainable behaviour and SWB (Ryan et al, 2006). In terms of the sustainability, three SWB dimensions are of particular interest, namely economic, environmental and social well-being (O'Connell et al, 2013).

Economic well-being

Research indicates that there is some correlation between wealth and well-being. Levels of SWB are often lower among the very poor (Myers, 2000). Economists have typically been of the opinion that well-being is dependent on life circumstances, inferring that if economic well-being increases substantially for a person, then the overall well-being of that person will also increase (Easterlin, 2006). Since money is an essential part of survival, it may contribute, up to a certain level, to the well-being of a person in allowing them the ability to meet all basic needs. Yet, for someone who is already wealthy and who has long since fulfilled basic human needs, a further increase in income may

not necessarily have the same positive effect on their well-being. This means that once an adequate level of income is achieved, additional increases may not necessarily contribute to higher levels of SWB (Myers, 2000). In fact, as pointed out by Hamilton and Denniss (2005:14), increased economic aspirations and materialism of the affluent have been associated with declining levels of well-being.

It is thus argued that SWB correlates to some degree with economic prosperity, but beyond a certain point of economic affluence, such a correlation diminishes (Caporale et al, 2009). The industrialisation and economic growth of a country will thus influence SWB for low-income societies substantially more than for already established societies. In societies where economic development has reached a point of diminishing returns, a gradual but fundamental shift in the basic values and goals of the residents are experienced. These residents may begin to focus on the QOL, for instance such as a concern for environmental protection and social issues, as opposed to wealth accumulation alone (Inglehart, 1999). The economic domain of SWB is therefore concerned with personal consumption expenditure and economic status, but should also be measured in relation to the quality of the natural environment as well as social relationships (Talberth et al, 2006).

Environmental well-being

South Africa is an emerging economy and within that context, the focus of sustainability has mainly been on the growth of the economy and the eradication of poverty as opposed to the environmental-sustainability concerns of developed economies (Ingwe et al, 2010; Mittelman, n.d.). The expansion of economic practices has, however, in some instances been to the detriment of natural resources and sustainable production (Rogers & Ryan, 2001). Jackson (2005) argues that regardless of the development of a country, the consumer choices and chosen products have both a direct and indirect impact on the environment and also on a person's level of well-being. This is why sustainable consumption, synonymous with environmental well-being, has to be a key influence for national and international policy. Nationally, the goal for South Africa should be to maintain sustainable progress. Furthermore, the principle of environmental well-being should not distinguish between First and Third World contexts. Consumers should therefore consider

conscientious consumption to take into account the environmental impact of their choices, not only as a consideration for their own environmental well-being, but also for that of future generations (Pereira Heath & Chatzidakis, 2011).

Unfortunately, consumers are often ignorant of the consequences of their choices. Pereira Heath and Chatzidakis (2011) found that consumers do not believe that their individual contributions will make an adequate difference to the overall level of consumption of the nation. Changes in consumption at societal level are, however, paramount, especially in the light of their consequences that more severely impact on those less fortunate. It has been established that people living in poor communities pollute less than the affluent consumer, yet they live in areas of lower environmental quality, which in turn contributes to poorer health, increased stress and vulnerability to natural disasters (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). Environmental well-being therefore encompasses a much broader eudaemonic reflection that leads the consumer to also consider social relationships (Talberth et al, 2006).

Social well-being

Keyes (1998) explains that there are numerous social challenges in everyday life that govern social interaction and therefore well-being incorporates a social dimension. In adopting a social cognitive perspective, it is presumed that people function in social settings and act according to shared belief systems (Bandura, 1986). For these reasons, social acceptance may be viewed as a key dimension of social well-being and is an important pursuit for most individuals (Keyes, 1998). Sadly, some may consume beyond the point of need to gain membership of a social group or society that values possessions and material well-being (Meyers, 2000). Although consumption is part of daily living and to some extent, a prerequisite for social inclusion and acceptance, material consumption beyond actual needs can reduce individual (and national) well-being (Costanza, 2008). This reiterates the need for alternative measures of progress and well-being (e.g. GNH) that extend beyond economic principles and material consumption (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012).

Albeit that the lives of South Africans have improved over the past five years as stated in

the 2013 World Happiness Report, the country is still ranked 96th out of 156 countries on the happiness scale. The report further states that the level of happiness of the overall population has declined for the period 2010-2012 due to the population's social inequalities (Helliwell et al, 2013). Miller (2008) explains that members of a population are in varying degrees responsible for the results of the practices that they follow, which inevitably affect other members of that population group. In a developing economy such as South Africa, the poor and less privileged may be more severely affected by the excessive squandering of natural resources as they often directly rely on such resources for their livelihood (Madzwamuse, 2010; Rogers & Ryan, 2001). The less affluent also tend to find themselves locked into circumstances in which they cannot change their practices that easily. The onus thus largely remains on the more affluent, with increased spending power and whose consumption practices potentially require a higher share of the available resources (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2013) to make conscientious decisions that reflect greater responsibility and concern for the use of natural resources. Cultivating a greater sense of social responsibility and promoting conscientious decision making on an individual household level may, in conjunction with relevant policy structures, enhance the ability to address the larger scale social, economic and environmental imbalances. Correcting such imbalances would be important in alleviating a sense of deprivation, which has characterised the perspectives of many South Africans over the past years (Kingdon & Knight, 2007).

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

Social inequality is defined by Goldthorpe (2009) as the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within a population, ranked according to wealth, income, education, occupation, social and cultural perceptions. A concept closely related to social inequality is that of relative deprivation (RD) which refers to the subjective experience of being socially or economically deprived compared to peers (Wickham et al, 2014). The concept of RD has been introduced as an attempt to explain why the segment of people who label themselves as happy, has not increased much over time in developed economies, despite the growth of the economy. RD holds important implications for an emerging economy (Ravallion & Lokshin, 2010). Kingdon and Knight (2007) conducted a study to

determine the SWB of South Africans with particular reference to RD. The study found that while the conclusions for an emerging economy's affluent population is similar to those of a developed economy, the poor exhibited positive external effects to the increased income or wealth of their peers. The fact that RD differs regarding the implications for the affluent consumer (as opposed to the poor) implies that the justification of economic welfare as a sole determining factor of progress is not relevant (Ravallion & Lokshin, 2010).

RD, as a social psychological construct, is capable of shaping emotions, cognitions and behaviours. People need to be aware of what their peers possess in order to compare goods and come to the conclusion that they are deprived. RD may lead people to believe that they do not have what they deserve relative to reference groups, a belief which can result in anger and resentment (Smith et al, 2012). Similarly, conspicuous consumption and materialism as pursuits of social exhibition of economic and material wealth can be seen as harmful constructs, which in addition to the above, can result in further long-term negative consequences for the individual consumer (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

In addressing RD, it is also necessary to briefly reflect on the opposite behaviour of materialism and overconsumption that is known as asceticism which relates to psychopathologies and other self-destructive urges that might underline the stubborn self-denial of material consumption (Broker, 2013). At this point, the prevalence of asceticism in the South African emerging-market context is debatable, since consumer reports suggest that large segments of the local population have a "...clear aspirational drive to increase spending, especially for status purposes..." (PwC, 2012), which suggests a more materialistic inclination. Nonetheless, material consumption to some extent is needed for human survival, for achieving happiness as well as for defining an individual's identity. Since identity is abstract and interpersonal feedback results from a manifestation of the self in possessions, it can be concluded that possessions and actions are indicative of a person's identity and that therefore the concept of material consumption, within limits, is important for an individual on a personal level (Wong et al, 2012).

As can be gathered from the aforementioned arguments, the relationship between materialism

and well-being is very complex (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002) and thus it is necessary to seek solutions that address RD and allows for material possessions and economic affluence, in a sustainable manner (Hamilton & Denniss 2005:16-17). Since a consensus on what constitute overconsumption and too much economic affluence is highly unlikely, a pursuit of overall consumer well-being should be undertaken rather than determining adequate levels of affluence and individual consumption (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:67). In this regard, an understanding of consumers' approach to future discounting is required.

CONSUMERS' FUTURE DISCOUNTING PRACTICES

As humans are confronted with a choice of rewards available at different points in time, the perceived value of the choices available are discounted according to the expected time of delivery. Consumers generally behave impulsively in the present moment but plan to act patiently in future (McClure et al, 2004). According to Wilson and Daly (2004), people will discount the future when imminent goods are valued over future rewards. The level of optimum discounting will depend on the rate at which expected rewards will decline. Considering future rewards should be hard for people with impulsiveness and materialistic tendencies, since they appreciate the immediate consumption of objects as it provides temporary relief from an unsatisfactory state of being (Steinberg et al, 2009). This unsatisfactory state of being may emanate from a particular social setting and socio-cultural circumstances (Bandura, 1986). As discussed earlier, people are inclined to compare their situations with those of peers and with those who have higher social standings, which may compel them to consider the immediate rather than the long term implications of their behaviour (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011).

When consumers make the decision to purchase white goods (e.g. washing machines, refrigerators, stoves), the notion of future discounting becomes particularly innate. For example, the general perception exists that white goods with eco-friendly features are often more expensive than the alternative 'non-green' options, even though such appliances will offer greater long-term economic and environmental advantages (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2013). Often the reward that comes with a concern regarding future benefits is greater than with a product of lesser value in monetary terms that

does not hold as high promise for future benefits (Wang & Dvorak, 2010). In this regard, the South African white goods industry offer fertile ground for the exploration of the aforementioned constructs in terms of decisions that are made on an individual household level to acquire products that are considered valued durable possessions with long term implications.

OVERCONSUMPTION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WHITE GOODS INDUSTRY

White goods is a classification term used to describe household appliances, including kitchen, cooling, and laundry appliances (O'Connell et al, 2013). Due to the policies that existed prior to 1994, the majority of households in South Africa had limited access to basic services such as electricity supply and could therefore not own such goods. Various campaigns that were launched to decrease these discrepancies contributed to an increase in the delivery of electricity and piped water and therefore more South Africans were able to access the basic infrastructure that is needed to purchase and use white goods (Louw et al, 2008). This has contributed to a substantial growth in the South African white goods industry (PwC, 2012).

Despite progress in alleviating poor infrastructure, a large group of South Africans are still experiencing extreme material deprivation including that of basic white goods (Gradin, 2012). This implies that the impending consequences of RD are still rife within the country. Additionally, as more previously disadvantaged households acquire the means of obtaining appliances for the first time, the potential for further increases in the consumption of white goods are fairly probable. The question remains whether these households will consider the future consequences of their choices. It is thus argued that the concepts of RD and future discounting are realistic concerns in the local white goods industry.

An additional concern relating to the consumption of white goods is that globally a culture has been created of a "throwaway" society (Cooper, 2005). Within the appliance industry, the rising costs of repairs in relation to the decreasing replacement costs have significantly contributed to this (McCollough, 2009). Premature replacement of white goods by the local middle class consumer segment (Erasmus et al, 2005), reflects a similar trend in South Africa. The number of complex and high-

quality appliances has also increased, which adds to the desirability of new appliances (Hamilton & Denniss 2005:20). A benchmark is therefore created by the affluent consumers that is communicated to the onlooker through social perceptions, whereby fulfilling luxury "wants" is encouraged rather than simply satisfying basic "needs" (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:10), thus relating to the concept of affluenza.

The global proliferation of household appliances has contributed to a world-wide energy crisis (Du Pont, 1998). Nationally, the increase in service delivery to the South African population has also affected the energy supply of the nation (Inglesi-Lotz 2011). South Africa experienced a severe energy crisis that warranted much of President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation Address in February 2015 (SA news.gov.za, 2015b). The current energy constraints, but also including those of the past few years, have had devastating effects on the economy as well as detrimental implications for the individual consumer (SA news.gov.za, 2015b). This resulted in increased electricity costs which also have ramifications for households, especially regarding the consumption and use of their appliances (Inglesi-Lotz, 2011; PWC, 2012). Similarly, the world's capability to replenish water sources is being exceeded by human consumption (WWF, 2012; 2014). South Africa is once again not excluded from these global problems, since the country is currently experiencing a severe water crisis. Unlike electricity, water is seen as an economically cheap commodity but as a factor of economic development, its inadequate supply has major repercussions for the progress of the country.

Du Pont (1998) cautioned against the unrelenting overconsumption of white goods which is accompanied by a growing demand for energy and water resources that contributes to the prevailing environmental dilemma. In addition to the environmental consequences, purchasing white goods is a complex, high-risk consumer decision that has long term financial implications for the household (Erasmus et al, 2005). Furthermore, the type of consumption decision a person makes has implications for shaping and maintaining a self-identity (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 2011). With the above in mind, it is postulated that consumption of white goods has implications for a person's economic, environmental and social well-being culminating in SWB. In recognising the effect that consumption decisions will have on SWB, consumers should be encouraged to make responsible decisions which will not result in

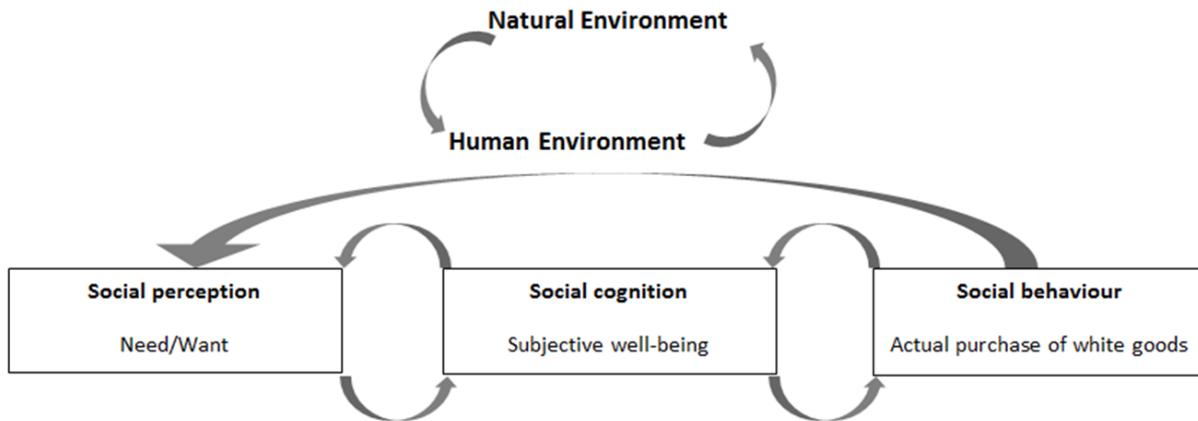


FIGURE 1: SOCIAL COGNITION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

future discounting. Such decisions may be explored from Social Cognitive and Self-Determination Theories, which may serve as a theoretical basis for further empirical investigation.

A PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONSCIENTIOUS CONSUMER DECISION MAKING

Several theories have been developed to explain the underlying socio-psychological factors (e.g. values, beliefs, norms and attitudes) that influence consumers' decision-making and environmentally responsible behaviour (Jackson, 2005). Yet, these models include constructs and construct associations that are primarily based on conditions in more developed countries and may therefore not adequately explain the unique complexities of the South African emerging market context (Mittelman, n.d; Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2013). Purchasing white goods reflect complex decision' making in itself (Erasmus et al, 2005), but may be even more intricate for consumers who reside in a developing economy such as South Africa.

As the challenge of understanding consumer decision making in unique contextual circumstances increases, researchers have started adopting theoretical frameworks that span across disciplines (Ungerer, 2014). This paper firstly drew inspiration from Adolphs's (2001) model that interprets social cognition in terms of neurobiology. In drawing on an interdisciplinary approach, the model is of particular value in understanding higher-order thinking that underlie complex decision making. More importantly, the model is embedded in the

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which serves as an appropriate basis for understanding the interrelationship of life satisfaction, RD, affluenza, SWB, future discounting and conscientious decision making in the context and specific setting of the South African white goods industry. According to the theory's assumptions, human agency is characterised by intentionality, forethought, self-regulation and self-reflection regarding individual capabilities, qualities of functioning and the meaning and purpose of individual pursuits, in particular social settings (Bandura, 1986). Building on these assumptions, Adolphs (2001) postulates that the ability to recognise, manipulate and behave in a socially relevant manner requires a person to connect perceptions to motivations, emotions and then adapt individual behaviour to reflect an acceptable social outcome. Figure 1 represents an adaption of Adolphs's (2001) model, and is based on the underlying notion that social perception will influence social cognition, resulting in social behaviour such as the purchasing of white goods. A person's decision to acquire such products will have environmental consequences and is thus influenced by both the human and natural environment.

In further refining the framework presented in Figure 1, the underlying assumptions of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), (Ryan et al, 2006) was added to the SCT basis to specify construct associations, as illustrated in Figure 2. In their SDT model, Ryan and Deci (2001) specify that eudaemonic as well as hedonic activities may lead to SWB, albeit that hedonic pursuits deliver short-lived results compared with the more enduring sense of SWB that eudaemonic goals yield. These assumptions underscore the

following research propositions:

P₁ Social perception implies that upon realisation of a need or a want, consumers who pursue hedonic goals will during their evaluation and selection of white goods compare their social standing to others through the principles of affluenza and RD in their pursuit of SWB.

As mentioned earlier, consumers are inclined to compare their situations with those of their peers and those who have a higher social standing, which may result in the conclusion that they are socially and/or economically deprived (Wickham et al, 2014). Potentially, this could result in expectations (wants) that cannot be met by current levels of income or possessions. This may allude to symptoms of affluenza (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005:5) and the short term hedonic pursuit of SWB. Conversely, it has been established that individuals who pursue long term eudaemonic goals consistently demonstrate high levels of life satisfaction (Ryan et al, 2006) and therefore:

P₂ Upon realisation of a need or a want, consumers who pursue eudaemonic goals will during their evaluation and selection of white goods compare their social standing to others and, based on their life satisfaction, pursue a more enduring sense of SWB.

Perceptions that result from consumers' appraisal of their current social standing will in turn impact on their social cognition, which describes their ability to construct representations that guide social behaviour in an

acceptable manner (Adolphs, 2001). More specifically, this may involve reflection about the financial or economic, social and environmental implications of acquiring an appliance. Therefore:

P₃ Through social cognition consumers can determine what effect the acquisition of white goods may have on their SWB in terms of economic, environmental and social dimensions.

Social perception and social cognition represent highly complex, flexible processes that allow consumers to perceive relevant stimuli and elicit appropriate social behaviour (Adolphs, 2001). Based on the theoretical background presented in this paper, a measure of life satisfaction and SWB may have much to say about an individual's approach to conscientious decision making and practices that extend beyond immediate gratification and reflect greater social and environmental responsibility. It is thus postulated that:

P₄ During the evaluation and selection of white goods, consumers with high levels of life satisfaction and eudaemonic pursuits of SWB will have the ability to assess future rewards and make conscientious decisions, whereas,

P₅ Consumers with high levels of affluenza, RD and hedonic pursuits of SWB will during the evaluation and selection of white goods opt for immediate gratification with limited future reward possibilities (i.e. future discounting).

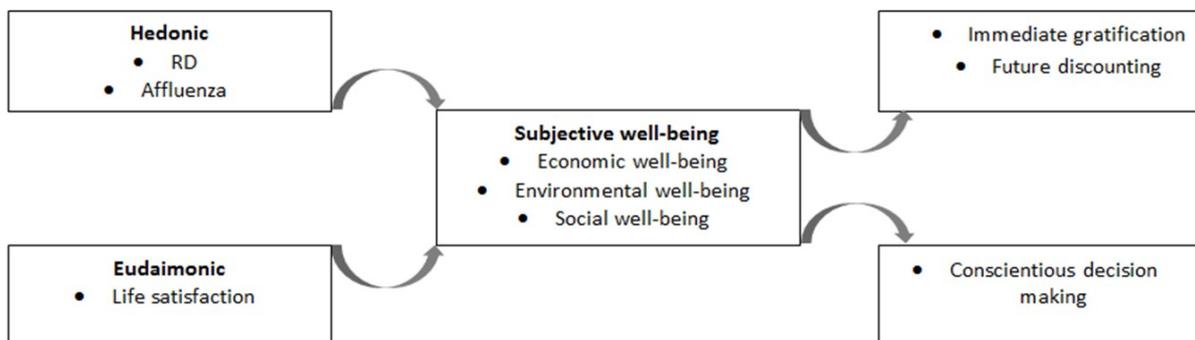


FIGURE 2: PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In summary, the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 2) includes both parsimony as well as explanatory completeness in representing a synthesis of eudaemonic goals with life satisfaction (Ryan et al, 2006) or hedonic goals that include concepts of affluenza (Hamilton & Denniss, 2000:5) and RD (Wickham et al, 2014), culminating in the overall pursuit of SWB, which can either result in future discounting or conscientious decision making (Steinberg et al, 2009) in the context of the specific setting of the South African white goods industry.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although several studies have investigated consumers' decision making in the South African white goods industry (e.g. Erasmus et al, 2005), none have explored the underlying influence of eudaemonic and hedonic goals such as RD, affluenza in the pursuit of SWB with subsequent future discounting or conscientious decision making in consumers' evaluation and selection of these products. These concepts may provide valuable insight into the dilemma of overconsumption by middle- to upper-income segments of the local population. Limited research has been done to explore the detrimental consequences of overconsumption in relation to consumers' well-being within an emerging economy. Such research is of vital importance since South Africa has the alarming potential to increase the country's ecological footprint past the means of sustainability to the detriment of all citizens in a pursuit of SWB.

As indicated by Hamilton and Denniss (2005:20), primary overconsumption expenditure in affluent societies relates to the home environment, which includes the typical home appliances that are found in upper-income households. To investigate consumers' evaluation and selection of these appliances in an emerging economy, the focus must be on affluent consumers who are in the position to acquire such white goods and who can select products with eco-friendly features from a wide merchandise assortment such as those found in urban retail outlets. Since affluenza and RD allude to the fact that less affluent consumers will emulate the wealthier consumers, encouraging responsible decision making among the upper-income consumer segments may eventually filter through to other segments of the population.

In adopting the underlying assumptions of the

theoretical viewpoints presented in this paper, empirical research could offer a unique perspective on the relationship between consumption and well-being in an emerging economy. Gaining a deeper understanding of such an association may be applied to guide policy decisions that promote SWB and conscientious consumption which in turn may benefit the pursuit of sustainability for all South Africans. On a macro level, policy formulation could for example be guided by alternative measures such as the GNH Index (as opposed to the GDP) to determine South Africa's overall SWB with the inclusion of economic prosperity in addition to the goals of sustainability. Since the GNH considers citizens' personal SWB as part of a country's national index, more attention can be focused on those who have not yet attained appropriate levels of SWB (Ura et al, 2012).

From a practical point of view, efforts are needed to encourage conscientious decision making and promote white goods with eco-friendly features. Empirical findings may contribute to such efforts. Even though eco-friendly appliances are usually priced at a premium (Peattie & Crane, 2005), the economic savings that such an appliance will offer in the long term will add to the economic well-being of an individual. Apart from economic benefits, purchasing appliances with eco-friendly features may demonstrate an individual's social willingness towards sustainability by contributing toward solving the larger energy and water supply problems of the country and in so doing satisfy the concept of environmental and social well-being.

In developing policy that may promote conscientious decision making in the South African white goods industry, examples can be taken from the "Japanese Top Runner" and the European Union's EcoDesign directive. These initiatives compel manufacturers to create and supply goods with less harmful consequences so that products with low eco-efficiency are eliminated from the consumer market (De Almeida et al, 2011; Kimura, 2010). The aforementioned relates to Thaler and Sunstein's (2003) concept of "nudge" whereby government and other relevant stakeholders encourage conscientious decision making through so-called "choice architecture", i.e. consumers still have options to choose from, but the less eco-friendly alternatives are simply eliminated from the market.

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