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**COMPENSATORY CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER COMPROMISE: A
THEORETICAL REVIEW, QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION, AND COMPREHENSIVE
MODEL**

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS TO THE FACULTY OF
THE DURHAM UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL
BY

BERNADETT KOLES

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis focuses on compensatory consumption and consumer compromise. The approach taken is novel in that it embraces a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption, emphasises the importance of contextual considerations, captures a continuum of compensatory engagements, and discusses compensation and compromise simultaneously as they occur within the consumer's lifeworld. The research employs a set of phenomenological interviews, reaching beyond the current literature that is predominantly experimental and reliant upon student samples and US panel data. This study gave rise to four different consumer types that emerged as a function of four key pillars: 1) the extent of congruence between actual and ideal self-states and consumer identities, 2) the extent of self-acceptance, 3) the underlying motivations that drive compensatory and compromisory engagements; and finally 4) the extent of need satisfaction achieved from the compensatory consumer experience. The present work is important in that it makes a variety of theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of compensatory consumption, advances our understanding of the interrelations between compensation and compromise, and proposes meaningful insights to complement existing consumer research. In particular, relevant links are established within the area of goal theory and how they relate to compensation as opposed to compromise; the literature on post-consumption rationalisation as a form of defence; and finally, the role of non-consumption and anti-consumption in compensatory engagements. Managerial implications are highlighted, and future research directions are offered.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

1-A. Overview

Reasons driving consumer preferences and decisions have long captured the attention of scholars and practitioners. Although historically consumers were thought to be rational and predictable agents acting upon conscious and utilitarian forces, it is increasingly clear that much of the time individuals behave in quite the opposite fashion; they are often irrational, unpredictable, and are driven by emotions, unconscious impulses, and hedonic triggers as opposed to deliberate consideration (Markin, 1979). Interestingly, some of these behaviours have become so commonplace that many of us are probably able to recall having engaged in similar comportments relatively easily. For instance, we may admit to turning to comforting treats like chocolate when we are sad or disappointed. Or purchase a piece of clothing on the spur of the moment to later wonder whether we needed it in the first place. Or reward ourselves with something special because we got that job we really wanted. The corresponding terminology like compensation (Gronmo, 1984; Cluley, 2015), impulse shopping (Amos, Holmes, & Keneson, 2014) or retail therapy (Kang, 2009; Atalay & Meloy, 2011) has also become frequently used beyond academic discourse and has permeated our everyday language. Surprisingly however, conceptual as well as empirical work focusing on these constructs remains scarce and inconclusive (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, & Rucker, 2015). The current thesis is devoted to an in-depth examination of compensatory consumption and its related manifestations, in order to complement the literature and achieve a more holistic understanding of this complex phenomenon.

1-A.1. Why compensatory consumption – A background and brief history

Material goods and services serve important purposes in our everyday lives (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995; Cluley, 2015). Among their many features, they are important as they help us differentiate ourselves from others (Goffman, 1959; Kassarian, 1971; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009), accentuate our creative potential (Eccles, Woodruffe-Burton, & Elliott, 2006), construct and extend our sense of self (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010), and even experience *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles, & Elliott, 2002a). Given their symbolic meaning, products play a substantial role in the formation, maintenance and communication of identity (Elliott, 1998; Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Oyserman, 2009; Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009), encouraging consumers to select objects that are meaningful for them (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Ferraro, Kirmani, & Matherly, 2013).

Recognition of this dynamic interaction between individuals and products contributed to the expansion of traditional consumer research, moving it beyond assumptions of rationality (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995). It has long been established that consumers

are often irrational, unpredictable, and driven by emotions, unconscious impulses, and hedonic triggers (Markin, 1979; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Beginning in the early 1930s, there was an observable shift in thinking about the marketing of consumer goods which entailed placing an increasing emphasis on the consumer and their needs and wants (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Moreover, it was acknowledged that much of consumption was not urgent, is optional, and can be postponed (Tosdal, 1933).

Consumption has become increasingly linked to overall wellbeing, with several theories proposed to explain this rather complex and multifaceted dynamic (Paim, 1995). Differences between the competing frameworks tend to be rooted in their evaluation of wellbeing, purported to be a function of 1) overall amount of consumption (i.e. greater consumption, higher wellbeing); 2) the gap between one's actual level of consumption and expected standards (i.e. greater difference, lower wellbeing); 3) the downward discrepancy between current versus historical levels of consumption (i.e. greater difference in the negative direction, lower wellbeing); and finally 4) the extent of balance across the different consumption categories (greater balance, higher wellbeing) (Michalos, 1983; Magrabi, 1991; Paim, 1995). Consumer research has also increasingly shifted the emphasis from solely utilitarian considerations that aim to fulfil tangible, practical and non-sensory needs to incorporating hedonic aspects that address fantasy, enjoyment and experiential benefits (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2008). These shifts recognise that consumption may serve as a vehicle not only to obtain goods and services, but also to achieve rewarding existential states (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Reflecting a more widespread appreciation for these and related issues, scholars now stress the importance of emotional, experiential and non-conscious mechanisms in structuring decision-making and behaviour (Bargh, 2002; Henning, Hennig-Thurau, & Feiereisen, 2012). They pay increasing attention to customer characteristics and attest to the diverse ways in which people engage with a varied range of product categories. Specifically, an increasing body of work has emerged documenting the influence of psychological and personal attributes on consumption, including stable and enduring features like propensity for depression, as well as transient and situational qualities like retail environment and product characteristics (Kleine et al., 1995; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009; Amos et al., 2014; Antonetti & Baines, 2014).

Our understanding of consumption behaviour has, as the foregoing indicates, taken leaps and bounds. Untangling the thicket of this literature is challenging in general, as well as in relation to compensatory consumption (Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Mandel, Rucker, Levav, & Galinsky, 2017), the focus of this thesis. Synthesising earlier definitions (Gronmo, 1988; Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Kang, 2009; Rucker & Galinsky, 2013; Kim & Gal, 2014), compensatory consumption refers to the focus upon, deliberation about, acquisition and use of products in response to a deficit triggered by *perceived* needs and desires that cannot be fulfilled directly. For instance, some people may feel the need to be thinner, more popular, more loved,

or more successful. As a form of compensation, these needs are often fulfilled through an alternative means, for instance by organising a dinner date with close friends instead of a date with one's spouse, or by purchasing a designer suit after having been declined for a position.

The umbrella term of compensatory consumption captures a wide range of aspects, including retail therapy (Elliott, Eccles, & Gournay, 1996; Kang, 2009), compulsive shopping (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), impulsive buying (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998), hedonistic shopping (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013), conspicuous consumption (Shukla, 2008; Chaudhuri, Mazumdar, & Ghoshal, 2011) and compensatory eating (Grunert, 1994). These concepts will be discussed in detail in the literature review in Chapter 2. Reading across this scholarship, there is a core narrative thread: behaviours tend to occur in response to a precursor like low self-esteem (Gronmo, 1988), difficult or stressful situations (Andreasen, 1984; van Kempen, 2007; Ruvio, Somer, & Rindfleisch, 2014), and more prosaically, boredom (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998).

1-B. Statement of the problem

Many of us are probably able to recall having engaged in compensatory practices, both negative and positive. We may turn to treats like chocolate when we are sad or disappointed or reward ourselves with something special because we got that job we really wanted. Despite its wide usage in everyday discourse, several discrepancies and limitations continue to characterise the available literature on compensatory consumption; many of which are attributable to the currently available and often overly simplistic definitions and conceptualisations. For instance, compensatory consumption is often portrayed as a single isolated behaviour that entails independent activities like purchasing a pair of jeans or buying a particular soundtrack, disregarding its multi-dimensional and multi-faceted nature that can spread to pre- and post-consumption periods, and thus include purchase intentions as well as subsequent product usage (Paim, 1995; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005). Similarly, compensatory consumption is mostly considered in relation to material goods, although other outlets such as food, services and social activities may also be relevant and should be taken into account (Grunert, 1994; Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994). Furthermore, many scholars emphasise an individual's engagement in compensatory behaviours in response to perceived personal threats and shortcomings, placing the potential impact of socio-contextual factors in the background (Garg & Lerner, 2006; Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009; Kim & Gal, 2014). Finally, existing definitions often fall short in capturing the extent of variation and diversity across the different sub-types and underlying motivations of compensatory consumption.

A few additional debates warrant mentioning given their prevalence in contemporary scholarly work on compensatory consumption. For instance, according to some researchers, compensatory consumption carries a negative connotation as it is expressed by a set of behaviours that may lead to addiction and compulsive tendencies (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; Kim & Gal, 2014). These conceptualisations run the risk of disproportionately emphasizing the importance of compulsive and

irrational behaviour, as opposed to presenting a more balanced account of compensatory tendencies. In contrast, a separate group of scholars accentuate the everyday nature of these comportments and their potential for even some therapeutic and mood-alleviating outcomes (Woodruffe, 1997; Kang, 2009). Similarly, many consider compensatory consumption particularly prevalent amongst disadvantaged and minority groups (van Kempen, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Gomez-Arias, 2008; Jaikumar & Sarin, 2015), while others emphasise its frequency in the general public (Grunert, 1994; Woodruffe, 1997; Elliott, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998).

In conclusion, it is fair to say that conceptual and empirical work dealing with compensatory consumption remains underdeveloped (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015), and that existing conceptualisations of compensatory practices remain fragmented. As such, a structured review will provide a synoptic framing of these core concerns across the scholarly tableaux, enabling researchers to determine appropriate gaps, areas for problematisation and productive empirical investigation.

1-C. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the concept of compensatory consumption, incorporating a continuum of behaviours and capturing the pre- and post-acquisition periods. In contrast with prior research where experimental approaches tend to dominate, in the present work a broad exploration of compensatory consumption experiences will be engaged that build on personal stories, experiential accounts and consumers' everyday shopping encounters. In addition to offering a comprehensive review of the extant literature, expanding upon the theory of need satisfaction, the current thesis also introduces a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. Along these lines, a proposed theoretical framework is presented and tested empirically that differentiates between compensatory and compromisory consumption based on the extent of consciousness, rationality and rationalisation exhibited by the consumer.

1-D. Research questions

Building on the discussion above and literature review presented in Chapter 2, the following research questions have been developed to guide the current thesis.

1-D.1. How is the process of compensatory consumption experienced within the everyday lives of individuals?

Throughout the thesis, I advocate a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption. This processual orientation captures pre- and post-acquisition periods, along with antecedents, triggers, motivations, behavioural acts and consequences. Portraying compensatory consumption as a single isolated behaviour associated with an independent event is a limitation, for instance, because the pre- and post-acquisition periods during a compensatory process are often more

meaningful for individuals than the single act of purchase (Fournier & Guiry, 1993). A particularly interesting area for further research would concern the combined impact elicited by a combination of antecedents, predispositions and triggers. This has not been examined in prior work and, as I will demonstrate based on the results, has the potential to reveal useful insights.

1-D.2. What is the role of context in compensatory consumption?

Throughout the literature review chapter, I emphasise the importance of contextual influences on compensatory consumption, moving beyond the orientation of many studies that focus on personal attributes while neglecting socio-contextual factors (Garg & Lerner, 2006; Gao et al., 2009; Kim & Gal, 2014). This point is important given that the *interaction* between dispositional and situational influences is suggested to have the largest explanatory power in unravelling compensatory tendencies (Amos et al., 2014). With this aim in mind, as will be elaborated upon at length in Chapter 3, qualitative methods and phenomenological interviews have been used as they are well suited to address contextual aspects. Via eliciting personally meaningful stories and narratives from respondents, these forms of inquiry may reveal the enactment of compensation within the specific context as experienced by the individual. Phenomenological interviews within the compensatory consumption literature are scarce, limiting our understanding of compensatory engagements within the everyday lifeworld of individuals.

1-D.3. Does a continuum of compensatory consumption behaviours exist?

Compensatory consumption in the present thesis will be conceptualised as an umbrella term that unites a constellation of practices along a continuum. Prior research frequently defined the term in a more generalised fashion, disregarding the variation across the different behavioural manifestations. This is a shortcoming in that such a view tends to accentuate the negative consequences derived from compensatory engagements, at the expense of recognising their potential for positive outcomes and associations. Along the same lines, many studies – particularly those embracing experimental traditions – position compensatory consumption in a rather negative light. However, what might look like negative consequences through the narrow empirical window offered by unnatural laboratory settings, may not be understood as such by the consumer or when interpreted against the tapestry of their everyday lifeworld. Reflecting this, a growing amount of evidence portrays compensatory consumption as a regular consumer activity (Grunert, 1994; Woodruffe, 1997) that should be viewed as an extension of normal consumption behaviours (Gardner, 1985; D'Astous, 1990; Elliott et al., 1996). Consistently with these latter ideas, the present research will explore compensatory occurrences within everyday experiential encounters and examine whether a continuum of behaviour exists as proposed.

1-D.4. What role does compromise play in the everyday lives of consumers?

As part of the current thesis, a novel conceptual distinction will be introduced between compensation and compromise. Given the general lack of empirical work in the area of consumer compromise, this notion – in relation to compensatory consumption – should be explored further in empirical work to examine how it occurs in practice and in everyday scenarios. A particularly interesting area for further investigation would concern the extent of rationalisation and its role in justifying compensatory and compromisory engagements; an area that will be empirically explored in the present thesis.

1-E. Significance of the study

From a conceptual standpoint, in the present thesis I advocate a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption; one that captures a continuum of behaviours, accounts for pre- and post-acquisition periods, and reaches beyond the consumption of material goods. I also emphasise the importance of contextual considerations throughout this thesis, assigning more weight to the consumer's evaluation of the situation than has been customary in existing work. My research is novel in that it explores the simultaneous impact of compensation and compromise in consumption, proposing insights to complement contemporary consumer research in meaningful ways. In particular, reaching beyond the extant literature on compensatory and compromisory consumption, relevant links can be established with the area of goal theory (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Kopetz, Kruglanski, Arens, Etkin, & Johnson, 2012; Bonezzi, 2013; Haiyang, Stamatogiannakis, & Chattopadhyay, 2015). Considering the importance of different motivations underlying compensatory and compromisory engagements, goal theory may provide a useful lens through which to advance our understanding of the distinction between compensation and compromise; an area that seems meaningful yet has not been taken forward in the existing literature.

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

compensatory and compromisory consumption may help disentangle the emotional and cognitive processes that characterise consumer reflection during the post-consumption period.

To address a final conceptual gap, the present research will explore the extent to which non-consumption and anti-consumption may be relevant in the area of compensatory and compromisory consumption. For instance, Nixon and Gabriel (2016) and Buchanan-Oliver and Savage (2006) suggest that choosing not to consume a product can be just as significant in terms of defining self-identity as choosing to consume.

From a methodological standpoint, much of the work on compensatory consumption builds on student-based samples (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015), which is likely to limit transferability of the findings (Park & Lessig, 1977). Connected to this, the present study continues the interpretive work of Woodruffe (1997), Hamilton (2009) and others, moving beyond experimental laboratories to explore compensatory and compromisory tendencies in real life settings (Echo Wen, Vohs, & Chen, 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, & Rucker, 2015). This is especially important in the study of complex phenomena that entails personally-driven, emotionally charged and only partially conscious processes – all of which are difficult to reproduce within laboratory boundaries (Ariely, 2008; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009).

Importantly, the above-mentioned gaps in the literature accentuate the need for work that elaborates upon the influence of specific events, situations and contextual occurrences on compensatory and compromisory consumption. Furthermore, throughout the present thesis, I illustrate that different behaviours entail different levels of conscious awareness, rationality and rationalisation; a point which has important implications for methodology. While quantitative and experimental approaches may work well in exploring transactions and consumption engagements where the consumer is highly attentive, this may not be the case in other scenarios. Ultimately, there is a need for greater diversification of methodologies that embrace more qualitative and mixed methods approaches which are under-utilised in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption.

1-F. Summary of methodology

The current study adopts the ontological position of social constructivism, and under this greater umbrella is situated in the theoretical orbit of interpretive consumer research, embracing an interpretivist paradigm (Moustakas, 1994; Bailey, 2014). Consequently, the principles guiding methodological choices were aiming to 1) involve regular consumption encounters to understand important aspects about the lifeworld of the participant; 2) elicit memorable engagements and detailed personal descriptions that reflect upon the entire compensatory process, and 3) explore the consumption experience from the perspective of the individual, and within the context in which it arises.

Phenomenological interviews were chosen as the principal method of data collection for this thesis, which have been used increasingly in consumer research (Myers, 1985; Stern, Thompson, & Arnould, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton & Wakenshaw, 2011; Russell & Levy, 2012; Karanika & Hogg, 2013; Ulver & Ostberg, 2014) and have dominated much of contemporary research within interpretive consumer research. With the four key research questions in mind, a set of interview questions are crafted to address these general research areas, and to a priori ensure relevance, resulting in an interview schedule that will be presented in Chapter 3. The interview schedule was created on the basis of prior literature, which then was tested in five pilot interviews to assess overall clarity and usability of the questions. The length of interviews ranged between 60 and 120 minutes.

The present study builds on interviews with 20 participants, which is in line with general interview research practice that tends to incorporate samples roughly between 2 and 25 individuals (Creswell, 2013). In line with the guiding principles set out by Russell and Levy (2012) to pursue interpretive work until reaching theoretical saturation, in the current study, theoretical saturation was achieved at approximately the 15th interview, beyond which point the new interviews did not contribute with new ideas or concepts. Recruitment of participants was pursued from within the primary investigator's distal social network. Following the interview, the researcher advanced to the analysis phase and worked on the transcribed interview material in its entirety. NVivo 12 was used for purposes of in-depth interpretation, identifying codes that were in line with the overall exploratory aims of the study.

Following the initial descriptive and note-taking phase, the next stage entailed the identification and development of emergent themes, embracing a multi-level approach (Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 1997). Guidelines for interpretive analysis emphasise the continuum and sufficient balance between description and interpretation (Kvale, 1983). During the phenomenological interviews, participants' lifeworlds were described spontaneously, without any interpretation attempt made by either parties. During the writing process, the researcher proceeded from a textural description of *what* the participant experienced, to a structural description of *how* the experience took place (Creswell, 2013). Particular emphasis was placed on theorising to go beyond the descriptions offered by the participants' experiential accounts to situate the findings within a suitable theoretical framework, and accentuate the theoretical contributions of the study (Reinecke, Arnold, & Palazzo, 2016). Ultimately, the aim was to have the reader walk away from the phenomenological study feeling that he or she understood better what it may be like for someone to experience the given phenomenon under exploration (Polkinghorne, 1989).

1-G. Structure

The structure of the thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter 2 will begin with an extensive theoretical as well as empirical review of the focal and distal literature on compensatory consumption, in order to assess the present state of research and identify relevant gaps. After offering a comprehensive definition

for compensatory consumption, I expand upon Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction, introducing a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. Finally, I conclude the chapter by offering a model to map different compensatory and compromisory consumption forms as a function of consumer rationality and consciousness, which will then be tested empirically in later chapters of the thesis.

Building on this review, Chapter 3 will be devoted to the positioning of the current empirical work and appropriate methodological stance taken. First, I revisit available scholarly research assembled in Chapter 2, paying close attention to their methodological orientations. This phase will enable the identification of limitations that characterise the compensatory consumption literature; namely the heavy representation of positivist and experimental research at the expense of qualitatively oriented scholarship. Building on this material, I introduce and briefly review two research traditions – interpretive consumer research and social constructivism, highlighting certain complimentary benefits they provide as an effective lens through which to explore compensatory and compromisory consumption.

The remaining part of Chapter 3 will focus on the current study and its methodological directions. In particular, I elaborate on the philosophical and research foundations underlying phenomenological analyses. This phase is important given its role in justifying the methodological selection, guiding the process of problem formulation, shaping the research questions, informing the search for appropriate methods and instruments, and enlightening subsequent analysis (Huff, 2009; Twining, Heller, Nussbaum, & Tsai, 2017). In terms of specific research tools, I offer a detailed outline for the phenomenological interview method. Finally, I conclude the chapter by specifying additional methodological details to orient the empirical phase of this thesis.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will be dedicated to a detailed review of the results drawing upon all of the phenomenological interviews, within the overall structure of the four research questions proposed at the end of Chapter 2. In Chapter 4, I present further specifics concerning the participants, along with key observations and emerging themes that will be important to set the stage for the following two results chapters. Then in Chapter 5, I concentrate on the first two research questions associated with how the process of compensatory engagement is experienced within the everyday lives of consumers, and what role context plays in compensatory consumption. In this chapter, I explore specific themes and trends that emerged on the basis of the interviews, supporting them with quotations and excerpts from consumer stories. In Chapter 6, I turn to the remaining two research questions, and hence I investigate the continuum of compensatory consumption and the role of compromise in the everyday lives of consumers. Within the auspices of my overall mission to explore compensatory and compromisory consumption in the lifeworld of participants, I also revisit the proposed conceptual frameworks comparing and contrasting compensatory tendencies and compromise throughout Chapter

2. In Chapter 6, I concentrate on the findings that emerged based on the interview data, with only sporadic reference to the literature and to the material presented in Chapter 2.

Finally, Chapter 7 will draw explicit links between the findings from the phenomenological interviews with the extant literature. In addition to synthesising the results with earlier conceptual and empirical work, Chapter 7 will present three concrete areas which advance the compensatory and compromisory field of inquiry in meaningful ways. First, I apply aspects of goal theory to explore the potential motivational differences characterising compensatory and compromisory consumption. Building on the work of Haiyang et al. (2015) and the distinction they draw between attainment and maintenance goals, I propose an important differentiation between compensating as opposed to compromising consumers.

Second, throughout the thesis I pay particular attention to the period that follows a given purchase, which has important ramifications to our understanding of the interplay between compensatory and compromisory consumption. More specifically, I explore the rationalisation process in which consumers engage in an attempt to justify their behaviours to themselves and others, expanding upon the work of Markin (1979). The ultimate aim of these contemplations will be to help disentangle the emotional and cognitive processes that characterise consumer reflection during the post-acquisition period. Finally, I explore the extent to which negative consumption or non-consumption may be relevant in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption; an area that has been explored within consumer research (Buchanan-Oliver & Savage, 2006; Nixon & Gabriel, 2016) but has not been applied specifically to compensatory and compromisory engagements. At the end of the chapter, I review limitations, offer managerial implications and propose future research directions.

CHAPTER 2¹.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2-A. Chapter outline

The current chapter will assess the present state of research on compensatory consumption. First, I offer a theoretical overview of the focal concept, which will be complemented by a review of existing empirical work. Then the distal literature will be consulted to establish a continuum of behaviours under the auspices of a compensatory umbrella. I will advocate a processual orientation, capturing antecedents, behavioural manifestations and consequences associated with each compensatory form. Furthermore, I will expand upon Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction, introducing a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by offering a model to map different compensatory and compromisory consumption forms as a function of consumer rationality and consciousness, which will then be tested empirically in later chapters of this thesis.

2-B. Introduction of theoretical foundations, key concepts, terminologies and definitions

Compensatory consumption is an umbrella term that captures consumer intentions and behavioural responses triggered by perceived deficits, needs and desires that cannot be fulfilled directly and are therefore compensated for via alternative means. Compensatory practices are typically a reaction to a discrepancy or incongruence between individuals' ideal and actual self-views (Gould, 1993). This divergence stimulates discomfort which is addressed via consumption (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, et al., 2015). Although many scholars argue that this is the motivation for most consumption (Ahuvia, 2005; Eccles et al., 2006), compensatory practices are unique because they engage alternative rather than direct means of needs fulfilment.

As an example to illustrate this distinction, imagine Tom who is in the market for a new TV because his old one has broken down and is no longer functional. In this case, Tom's need is clear and the new acquisition serves as direct fulfilment. Now imagine that Tom's TV – although not particularly new – is still fine and he did not consider replacing it. An old friend of his from high school invites Tom over for a social gathering at his house. It is a rather upscale party, Tom admires his friend's penthouse apartment with great furniture and decor, and he even wonders why he was invited in the first place. All guests are obviously successful, popular, classy, and just seem to have it all. Tom notices the guests gathering around his friend's new TV. Latest model, great resolution, perfect image. All of a sudden Tom feels the urge to replace his own TV and buy a new one like his friend's. In this latter scenario,

¹ The conceptual part of this thesis has been published and can be found using the following citation: Koles, B., Wells, V., & Tadjewski, M. (2018) Compensatory consumption and consumer compromises: a state-of-the-art review, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34:1-2, 96-133.

the need is not as clear as it was before and is likely to address a more general rather than a specific or concrete lack.

To address states of self-incongruence, people often seek and acquire relevant products, services and means that symbolise accomplishment. Consumers may increase their overall levels of consumption (Hoegg, Scott, Morales, & Dahl, 2014); they might spend more money on self-affirming goods (Echo Wen, Vohs, et al., 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, et al., 2015); or consume products that signal desirable traits (Rucker, Levav, & Lisjak, 2014), projecting a concern with self-improvement (Allard & White, 2015), power and status (van Kempen, 2007; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008) or masculinity (Moisio, 2007) to their intended audience. Although this list is by no means comprehensive, it does present a wide range of ways in which compensatory practices may manifest themselves in everyday consumer behavioural engagements.

In terms of the sequence of content, I begin the current chapter by reviewing existing definitions of compensatory consumption, followed by a compilation of empirical work available to date. An important restriction should be noted, in that it was decided to exclude research focusing exclusively on substance abuse. While the potentially negative consequences of the use of drugs, alcohol and excessive food intake are considered in their associations with addictive and compulsive consumption, the aim of the current thesis is to focus on general as opposed to psychiatric or problematic populations.

Next, I present a review of the extant literature, incorporating compulsive buying, addictive shopping, impulsive purchases, conspicuous consumption, self-gifting and retail therapy. Building on this extensive review, I assess the antecedents and motivations, behavioural manifestations and consequences associated with compensatory consumption. Building on the theory of need satisfaction (Gronmo, 1988), an important differentiation is introduced in the form of a conceptual model that distinguishes between compensation and compromise. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary that foreshadows key directions undertaken in the empirical part of this thesis.

2-B.1. The theoretical foundations of compensatory consumption

The roots of *compensation* can be traced back to early psychoanalytic thought and the issue is particularly indebted to Alfred Adler (Adler, 1970). Embracing the theory of holism, Adler underscored the importance of compensation in addressing perceived inferiorities such as lack of power and low self-esteem (Vaughan, 1927). Drawing parallels between human physiology and psychology, he posited that organ inferiority, referring to weak areas in the human body associated with suboptimal organ functioning, can serve as a motivating force for people to drive themselves to strive for greater things. For instance, a weaker heart is known to overproduce and over-perform in order to compensate for the shortcoming, to the extent that over time it becomes larger and stronger than an average heart (Adler & Jelliffe, 1917). Applying these processes to the human psyche, Adler (1916) asserted that all psychological phenomena commence with a feeling of inferiority that propels the person to move

upward and overcome unpleasant sensations – either within or outside the given domain. This process is likely to begin in childhood and continue throughout the lifespan. For instance, an unathletic child may focus on their academic labours thereby gaining scholarly recognition as a compensation for their athletic limitations (Gronmo, 1988).

Since Adler's time, the notion of compensation has diffused across multiple disciplines, eventually influencing consumer behaviour. The term *compensatory consumption* was first coined in the 1960s (Caplovitz, 1963), emerging from field research among low-income families in the United States. However, the idea that consumption is influenced by non-rational forces has much earlier genealogical precedents (Veblen, 1899; Mitchell, 1912; Thorndike, 1940). Nonetheless, the 1950s witnessed a major turning point with much greater emphasis on experiential, emotional and non-utilitarian aspects of consumption (Kassarjian, 1971). This, of course, was the period during which motivation research garnered academic and practitioner interest (Tadajewski, 2006). As part of closer connections between psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists and marketing professionals and consultants, the lexicon of desire, motivation, persuasion and symbolism were increasingly invoked when speaking about consumers (Levy, 1959). Within these debates, there was a limited amount of attention given to people who were structurally marginalised in society. These groups, it was realised, sought to generate the respect they were denied in the world of work (perhaps even by being outside traditional forms of employment) through their consumption habits. In other words, product symbolism was their compensation for unattainable social and professional advancement (Caplovitz, 1963).

Alongside this theoretical evolution of consumer behaviour, empirical studies on compensatory consumption received some attention, particularly in the late 1980s. Gronmo (1988), most notably, took a sociological lens to compensatory consumption. His proposed view contradicted most existing models based on direct or indirect correspondence between consumer needs and actions. He acknowledged that consumer behaviour might be need satisfying, when the process triggered by a *specific* unsatisfied need is followed by a consistent motive and action and ultimately results in need satisfaction. However, he purported that people – particularly in industrialised societies – are not always consistent and predictable, and often act in response to a more *general* drive to satisfy their needs for esteem and self-actualisation, and inadvertently attempt to compensate for certain deficiencies in their lives.

According to his theoretical model, the resulting compensatory tendencies can occur in one of two ways. The first scenario arises when there is a lack of consistency between the need and the motive. In these situations, individuals are not consciously aware of the real need, and correspondingly their motive follows an artificial need that is frequently stimulated by external forces like advertisement and marketing campaigns. For example, someone with a generally low self-esteem may be more likely to respond to a new smartphone advert by going out and purchasing it, although there is no immediate need given that their present phone is recent and in good condition. In contrast, the second scenario occurs when there is an inconsistency between the motive and the action. In these situations, although

people are conscious of the real need, they are faced with a general resource poverty that prevents them from taking the most appropriate action and end up reverting to often inadequate secondary alternatives (Gronmo, 1988). For instance, an individual longing for quality time with and affection from their spouse may instead settle for a coffee or dinner date with a friend, should the spouse be unavailable. The primary similarity between the two scenarios according to Gronmo is that neither one of them result in sufficient need satisfaction.

Subsequent research conceptualised compensatory consumption within particular domains, such as food or shopping. For instance, based on her research exploring the compensatory potential of food consumption, Grunert (1994) proposed that compensation occurs when an individual, in their attempt to satisfy a lack of X, uses a supply of Y instead of seeking a supply of X. As an example, X can be thought of as affection from one's romantic partner, which can be cured either directly by receiving more affection, or indirectly by being substituted by Y; a funny movie, time spent with a friend, or a delicious meal. In a similar line of work focusing on the special meaning and often compensatory nature of shopping (Woodruffe, 1997), Woodruffe-Burton (1998) positioned compensatory consumption as an activity that "is engaged in when an individual feels a need, a lack or desire which they cannot satisfy with a primary fulfilment so they seek and use an alternative means of fulfilment in its place" (pp. 301). These studies envision compensatory tendencies to occur as individuals attempt to address and make up for deficiency of some sort. Although these behaviours do not tackle the core problem *directly*, they enable individuals to relieve their discomfort by reverting to alternatives that are more immediately available and are within their control (Kang, 2009). Recent research has been put forward that embraces a view of compensatory consumption that might entail shopping, alcohol as well as food intake, and a range of other behaviours (Rucker et al., 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015).

Table 2.1 provides a chronological list of conceptual definitions for compensatory consumption that are presently available in the literature. It is important to note that while the term *compensation* and *compensatory consumption* are explored in a wide array of studies, a relatively few offer a working definition for this concept.

TABLE 2.1. Conceptual definitions of compensatory consumption.

Source	Definition
Caplovitz (1963)	Views compensatory consumption as an attempt to buy the symbols of respectability when it cannot be attained via occupational advancement or community activity.
Gronmo (1988)	Compensatory consumer behaviour means that consumption is heavily emphasised, as a reaction to, and as an attempt to make up for a general lack of esteem or self-actualisation. Compensation can be viewed as a reaction to threatened status, or as an action which makes amends for some lack or loss. By engaging in compensatory behaviours, individuals can increase their self-esteem via attempts to either develop a quality that differs from the one with the perceived lack or justify the self by denying the lacking quality's importance.
Grunert (1994)	In general terms, the phenomenon is that a lack of x could be cured by a supply of x, but may also be cured by a supply of y. If y is used, this process is called compensation.
Woodruffe (1997)	Compensatory consumption is engaged in when an individual feels a need, a lack or desire which they cannot satisfy with a primary fulfilment, so they seek and use an alternative means of fulfilment in its place.
Kang (2009)	Used synonymously with retail therapy, compensatory consumption is triggered by a psychosocial deficiency such as feeling distressed or bored, in response to which individuals go shopping and may make a purchase to compensate for the perceived deficiency. A purchase is not required, however, as shopping alone might also be compensatory.
Kim and Rucker (2012); Lisjak (2014); Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al. (2015)	Compensatory consumption captures a broad set of consumer behaviours aimed at offsetting the experience of a self-threat or self-discrepancy.
Rucker and Galinsky (2013)	The authors use the term compensatory consumption to define the desire for, acquisition, or use of products to respond to a psychological need or deficit. By compensatory, they mean that consumption is undertaken, implicitly or explicitly, to offset a threat to one's identity or preferred psychological state. By consumption, they refer to both the physical consumption of goods (e.g. wearing clothing, eating a meal) as well as consumers' product preferences (e.g. wanting a particular brand, preferring one snack to another).
Kim and Gal (2014)	Refers to an individual's response to information about deficits in their abilities, skills, status and so forth by consuming products that symbolically compensate for the self-deficits.
Mandel et al. (2017)	The authors introduce the term <i>compensatory consumer behaviour</i> to indicate any purchase, use, or consumption of products or services motivated by a desire to offset or reduce a self-discrepancy.

Synthesizing the above conceptualisations, the following working definition will be offered to serve as a basis for later development and extension throughout the present thesis:

Compensatory consumption refers to individuals' purchase intentions, acquisition and use of products in response to a certain deficit triggered by perceived social and psychological inadequacies

or by personal needs and desires that cannot be fulfilled directly. Instead, these needs are addressed through alternative means and via the purchase and use of goods and services that symbolically compensate for the particular deficit.

Whether or not compensatory consumption is a positive or a negative concept from the perspective of the individual continues to be the source of debate. On the one hand, there is some evidence to suggest that compensatory consumption is a *regular* consumer activity rather than one that is limited to specific or particularly disadvantaged groups (Grunert, 1994; Woodruffe, 1997), and in fact should be viewed as an extension of normal consumption behaviours (Gardner, 1985; D'Astous, 1990; Elliott et al., 1996). On the other hand, this concept often carries negative connotations (Bargh, 2002) at least in part due to its documented associations with substance abuse (Hirschman & Stern, 1999; Gul & Pesendorfer, 2007; Grover et al., 2011). Even in relation to non-clinical and non-medical populations, the potential negative outcomes tend to dominate contemporary research and are often portrayed as outweighing the possible psychological benefits. Some scholars argue that certain behaviours that begin as a relatively benign strategy to cope with low self-esteem and other self-deficits can easily get out of hand and result in overeating, binge drinking, excessive shopping, and various other addictions (Kim & Gal, 2014). Consequently, given that compensatory consumption does not address the real source of self-discrepancy, many question whether it has the potential to offer a fundamental cure as opposed to being a quick and transient fix for self-relevant threats (Rucker, 2009).

Certain further variations have been proposed along the continuum of compensatory outcomes. The first one concerns the consistency between the threatened and the pursued domains. More specifically, it appears that individuals prefer and seek threat-related and within-domain compensation when the signalling of their self-worth is directed inwards (Dalton, 2009; Gao et al., 2009; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, et al., 2015). In other words, if my intelligence is threatened, I may be more inclined to pursue intelligence-related products, such as self-help books and training guides, when I am alone and thus are not required to reveal my preferences to others. In contrast, individuals seek threat-unrelated and across-domain compensation when the self-worth signalling is directed outwards (Coleman & Williams, 2014; Rucker et al., 2014). So then in the above scenario, being in the presence of others, I may be more inclined to pursue products that are not related to my intelligence but rather reflect upon my status, such as a watch or a mobile phone, in order to avoid potentially negative social evaluations.

In addition, Kim and Rucker (2012) introduced a distinction referred to by the terms reactive versus proactive compensatory behaviours. On the one hand, *reactive* compensatory consumption occurs following an activated self-discrepancy, whereby individuals turn to consumption to avoid or deny the particular self-deficit information and in turn protect their self-concept. These scenarios tend to entail distraction or increased consumption in threat-unrelated domains. On the other hand, *proactive* compensatory consumption occurs when a given behaviour is motivated by a precautionary mindset that encourages individuals to a priori protect their selves and prevent a future discrepancy from arising. This latter form is characterised by increased consumption in domains related to the threat. To illustrate

the difference between the two types with an example, imagine Andy, a college student, who after having spent many months preparing for his medical school applications and exams finds out that he did not get into the program of his choice. Driven by a sense of denial, he may turn to partying with his friends, or to excessive eating or drinking (threat-unrelated consumption). Alternatively, being a good player, he may re-join the football team he previously quit to focus on his studies, in order to distract himself and achieve a sense of success in other areas (distraction). According to the authors' definition, both of these approaches would constitute as reactive forms of compensatory behaviours. Instead, Andy may also take the proactive route, whereby in anticipation of his potential failure to get into medical school, he may pursue a wide range of preparatory books and materials (threat-related consumption) in order to increase his chances of acceptance.

Along these lines, Kim and Gal (2014) introduce the term *adaptive* consumption to contrast compensatory forms of behavioural conduct, and purport it to be a more efficient as well as a healthier approach to deal with personal deficiencies. The authors propose that self-acceptance – defined as “the detachment of one's self-worth from one's self-assessment” (p. 527), can help achieve adaptive consumption, such that self-accepting individuals can re-appraise the self-deficit information to benign rather than harmful to their self-worth. Via minimising the valence of the self-threat, they can also re-evaluate the situation and no longer feel the need to seek and engage in compensatory tendencies.

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

2-B.2. Empirical research on compensatory consumption

An extensive search capturing the past 20 years of research on compensatory consumption was undertaken, using terms such as ‘compensation’ and ‘compensatory consumption’ in the most commonly used academic databases (including EBSCO, Google Scholar and JSTOR). To focus initial efforts, a literature search was conducted that targeted prior empirical and data driven work focusing on the focal phenomenon of interest, with the resulting set of studies (n=29) shown in Table 2.2. Only those studies that make *direct* reference to compensatory consumption within marketing and consumer behaviour will be considered here². Broader literature beyond the focal concept is explored later.

² In the case of Mazzocco et al. (2012), the focus is more on conspicuous consumption. Given that they used the term interchangeably with compensatory consumption, it is retained here.

TABLE 2.2. Chronological review of empirical studies investigating compensatory consumption.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Brannon (2019)	Investigates how self-verification motives influence consumers' preference within- and across-domain compensation strategies.	Journal of Marketing Management	Set of 2 experiments	MTurk (n=160; n=160)	Consumers with a self-verification motive tend to display an increased preference for within- (vs. across-) domain compensation following a self-threat, and also a greater desire for products that directly re-confirm the threatened aspect of their self-concept.
Coleman, Williams, and Morales (2019)	Links self-discrepancy triggered by identity threats to a reduction in working memory, and the mediating role of compensatory consumption.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 4 experiments	Combination of MTurk panel data and sampling from amongst US college students and staff (n=296; n=176; n=423; n=508)	Demonstrates the causal chain connecting identity threats, working memory capacity and compensatory consumption. Identity threats seem to lower working memory capacity, which in turn drives more positive evaluations of identity-relevant products.
Rustagi and Shrum (2019)	Explores the difference between implicit and explicit self-threat on self-repair against compensatory consumption.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 7 experiments	1) US MTurk panel (n=508; n=14; n=199); 2) Indian college students (n=108; n=79); 3) French students (n=71)	Compensatory consumption can successfully repair a damaged self-concept when the connections between the self-threat and the and compensatory product are implicit, but not when explicit connections are made.
Abdalla et al. (2016)	Develop a framework that integrates extended and expanded self-theories with compensatory consumption as a background.	International Business Review	Primary: interviews & group discussions. Secondary data: Assessment of media & interviews with key figures	Brazil-based; Young adults (8); Songs (14)	Found meaningful relations between identity building and consumption. The ' expanded self' category contained admiration, fame and envy relations among the lead figures, while the ' extended self' category included the role of the consumption of objects, brands and places in the transmission of identity aspects.
Lisjak et al. (2015)	Explore the relationship between self-regulation and within domain compensation.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 3 lab experiments	US-based; College students (1) n=173; (2) n=127 (3a) n=118; (3b) n=123	Although within-domain compensation can serve as a psychological remedy to repair the self, results indicate that it can also have negative effects. More specifically, the current research shows that engaging in within-domain compensation can trigger ruminative thinking about the threat, which in turn can undermine performance in subsequent tasks that require self-regulation; including behaviours ranging from resisting temptations by unhealthy food to performing on cognitively complex tasks.
Allard and White (2015)	Examines the notion that guilt leads to preferences for self-improvement products.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 5 lab experiments	Canada-based; College students n=97	Only feelings of guilt was found to have a unique motivation consequence that activates a desire for self-improvement and is linked with a general preference for self-improvement product choices. These findings only held in scenarios when purchasing was intended for the self as opposed to for others. Although the research does not address compensatory consumption per se, it has useful implications for this body of work.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Hoegg et al. (2014)	Examine ways in which consumers respond to and compensate for larger than expected clothing sizes.	Journal of Consumer Psychology	Mixed methods (1), (2) & (5) experiment; (3) & (4) online panel.	US-based; Female participants (1) n=119 college students; (2) n= 42 adults in weight loss program; (3) n=169 AmTurk; (4) n=91 AmTurk; (5) n=229 college students.	The findings suggest that larger clothing size results in more negative evaluations of the merchandise but can also lead to compensatory consumption of other appearance enhancing but mostly non-sized products. In other words, despite expectations, instead of lowering purchase intent, larger sizes can actually increase spending, as consumer engage in compensatory consumption to help repair their damaged self-esteem.
Kim and Gal (2014)	Investigate compensatory as opposed to adaptive consumption as a function of self-acceptance.	Journal of Consumer Research	Mixed methods (1) & (3) experiment; (2) Online panel.	US-based (1) n=291 AmTurk; (2a) n = 168 college students; (2b) n = 239 college students; (3a) n=96 AmTurk; (3b) n=139 AmTurk.	Identified self-acceptance as a moderator for engagement in compensatory as opposed to adaptive consumption in response to self-deficit information via changing the appraisal of the self-deficit from harmful to benign to self-worth.
Coleman and Williams (2014)	Explore individuals' response to emotions that is inconsistent with their greater emotional profile.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Specifics unreported	Specifics unreported	Emotions that are inconsistent with people' s salient social identity can undermine their identity enactment and thus pose a threat. In response, individuals show preference for products that boost that identity, relative to others that are consistent with their emotional profile.
Echo Wen et al. (2014a)	Study people' s responses to situations when they feel socially excluded.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 5 experiments	(1), (2), (3) & (5) specifics unreported; (4) US-based AmTurk	First, social exclusion was shown to trigger a loss of personal control and motivate people to save money as a means to regain control; with money representing personal control. Second, social exclusion increased spending on products that helped achieve social affiliation; with money being a means for acquiring social affiliation through products.
Echo Wen et al. (2014b)	Study consumers' choice of products in situations when they feel socially excluded as opposed to socially included.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 3 experiments	Beijing & Hong Kong; College students; (1) n=118 Beijing; (2) n = 101 Hong Kong; (3) n = 186 Beijing	After experiencing social exclusion, consumers tend to favour products to differentiate themselves and accentuate their uniqueness. This is particularly the case when they are manipulated to believe that their personality traits are stable as opposed to unstable, and when their self-views have been previously enhanced through self-affirmation.
Rucker et al. (2014)	Examine factors that influence how people compensate for threat.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 experiments	Specifics unreported	In situations when people are motivated to self-signal their self-worth following a threat, they prefer products that boost the self in the domain of the threat. In contrast, when people are motivated to signal their self-worth to others, they focus on their strengths and prefer products that boost the self in domains unrelated to the threat.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Stuppy et al. (2014)	Study whether or not the psychological experience of physical shortness increases compensatory consumption.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 lab experiments	Specifics unreported	Physical shortness increased compensatory consumption via posing a threat to identity and social status. People who feel chronically or temporarily short (vs. tall) show a preference for products high in status. Importantly, <i>feeling</i> short was found to affect status-seeking behaviours above and beyond <i>being</i> short, with compensatory strategies providing less socially harmful buffers against the threat than more permanent and detrimental life outcomes.
Bian et al. (2014)	Extend the literature on power via identifying boundary conditions mitigating the relationship between social power and compensatory consumption.	British Journal of Social Psychology	Set of 3 experiments	UK-based; College students; (1) n=80; (2) n=60; (3) n=187	Social power states appear to affect the consumption of luxury brand counterfeit products (LBPCP). In particular, the relationship between social power and LBPCP consumption was moderated by product conspicuousness. High power states were more likely to trigger consumption of highly conspicuous LBPC items. Purchase propensity for less conspicuous LBPC was constant regardless of power levels.
Kim and Rucker (2012)	Explore proactive versus reactive compensatory consumption.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 5 lab experiments	US-based; College students (1) n=153; (2) n=185; (3) n=113; (4) n=164; (5) n=84	Proactive compensatory consumption was engaged in to protect the self from an anticipated threat, while reactive compensatory consumption was employed for purposes of distraction. In other words, consumers can use products in a proactive manner to infuse the self with an additional layer of protection in anticipation of self-threats, which in turn minimises their negative impact once realised.
Ruvio and Dubois (2012)	Examine powerlessness-induced compensatory consumption of experiential vs. material purchases.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 2 online experiments	US-based; College students; (1) n=164; (2) n=128	Powerless consumers paid more for high status luxury products overall, and indicated a higher preference for experiential purchases over material ones. Hence, experiential purchases seem to have a greater compensatory power over material ones; at least in the case of powerless consumers.
Mazzocco et al. (2012)	Examine the impact of direct and vicarious identification with a low-status group on consumers' desire for status related objects.	Journal of Consumer Psychology	Set of 4 experiments	US-based; Online College students & adults (1) n=146; (2) n=117; (3) n=50; (4) n=69;	Conspicuous consumption desires were stronger for Blacks than Whites, particularly those who highly identified with their racial group. Vicarious identification with a low-status racial outgroup led Whites to desire status related products. The vicarious and temporary identification with a low-status outgroup is found sufficient to elicit conspicuous consumption desires.
Gaviria and Bluemelhuber (2010)	Investigate compensatory consumption when saying goodbye to familiar things and facing the loss of familiar contexts.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Grounded theory method; Case studies based on written and story telling exercises	US-based; Individuals with significant losses in their lives; n=10	Identified two groups of consumption strategies employed by individuals when faced with the loss of familiar contexts. On the one hand, they talk about the 'Teddy Bear Effect', referring to a coercive force that aims at preserving a past that may otherwise be forgotten. On the other hand, they mention the 'Rebound Effect' in regards to those situations where integrative concepts and multiple alternative action plans are needed in order to achieve future goals.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Dalton (2009)	Illustrate that threat to consumers' self-worth leads to compensation by choosing products that allow for self-expression.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 lab experiments	US-based; College students	A threat to one's self-worth increased consumers' propensity to trade up and choose the higher priced option in a choice between two options; but only when the decision to trade up occurred in a highly self-relevant domain. In less self-relevant domains, consumers showed a reduced propensity to trade up. Furthermore, buffering participants prior to the threat reduces their tendency to trade up in self-relevant products.
Gao et al. (2009)	Examine people's reactions and product selection following a momentarily lowered self-confidence in a given self-view; with as well as without prior direct or indirect bolstering to their self-views.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 4 lab experiments	Specifics unreported	Simple manipulations used to threaten consumer's confidence can have a significant impact on their subsequent choice of products in that they tend to seek those that will offset the characteristic of which there is doubt. Once customer's self-views are threatened by doubt, they are more likely to choose consumer products that display these characteristics. Such threats can be prevented via direct or indirect methods that bolster the self-concept.
Rucker and Galinsky (2009)	Explore consumers' compensatory tendencies in response to threats to their power.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 3 lab experiments	Specifics unreported	Evidence is found to support both compensatory and non-compensatory processes in consumer behaviour. Psychological states of powerlessness foster a desire to compensate for the loss of power, as manifested in a tendency to focus on and prefer products associated with status. In contrast, compared to the powerless, the powerful prefers products with attributes linked with performance.
Rucker and Galinsky (2008)	Examine how power affects consumers' spending propensities.	Journal of Consumer Research	Set of 3 lab experiments	US-based; College students (1) n=61; (2) n=127; (3) n=65	Low levels of power increased consumers' willingness to pay for auction items but only in the case of status related products.
Yurchisin et al. (2008)	Explore the relationship between life status changes, negative emotional states and compensatory consumption.	College Student Journal	Quantitative surveys (note: measure not validated)	US-based; College students n=301	Results indicated that students undergoing life status changes are more likely to engage in compensatory consumption when compared to those experiencing negative emotional states. Nonetheless, both the greater degrees of life status changes and the negative emotional states were found to be positively related to compensatory consumption.
van Kempen (2007)	Explore the spending habits of low-income indigenous vs. non-indigenous households.	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Household survey data	Bolivian sample; Low-income households; n=634	Found opposite effect in the propensity for compensatory consumption for socially visible durable goods between the two largest indigenous groups in Bolivia. In other words, instead of merely imitating the dominant culture, Bolivian indigenous groups appeared to seek higher status primarily within the group's own traditional prestige system.

Study	Aim	Outlet	Approach	Sample (Country, Source & Size)	Main contribution
Moisio (2007)	Examine motivations behind men's compensatory consumption.	Dissertation; University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE	Qualitative interviews	US-based; Lower, middle & upper- class males	Results indicate that less affluent males engage in compensatory consumption driven by a desire to reclaim status, whereas more affluent males wish to curb emasculation via DIY home improvement projects.
Garg and Lerner (2006)	Explore how people use compensatory consumption to cope with their affective state.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Set of 2 experiments	Specifics unreported	Via examining the role of individuals' emotional states such as being sad as opposed to being neutral on their subsequent food consumption and choice price for an object. The results suggest that while neutral individuals' choice price goes down after consuming a hedonic product, the opposite is the case for sad individuals.
Woodruffe- Burton and Elliott (2005)	Study compensatory consumption through the experiences of in-depth cases.	Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings)	Phenomenological interviews	UK-based; Adult females; n=2 Purposive sampling	Via describing their lived experiences and the associated meanings, women weaved together their consumption activities and experiences into a coherent identity narrative.
Woodruffe- Burton (1998)	Explore the role of clothes as compensatory consumption in men's lives through an exploratory study of male fashion addiction.	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	Phenomenological interviews	UK-based; Adult males; n=3 Purposive sampling	Demonstrated the subjects' consumption of fashion and shopping behaviour frequently to be compensatory in nature.
Woodruffe (1997)	Examine the role of compensatory consumption in women's lives.	Marketing Intelligence and Planning	Phenomenological interviews	UK-based; Adult females; n=3 Purposive sampling	Identified common trends on the basis of the three interviews in the women's engagement in compensatory consumption behaviours.

The table demonstrates that available studies focusing on compensatory consumption are not excessive in terms of numbers, but nonetheless address a range of areas and situations. Some researchers take a general orientation and study compensatory consumption as it occurs within the everyday lives of individuals. For instance, they explore the role compensatory engagements in identity formation (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016), in coping with the loss of familiar contexts (Gaviria & Bluemelhuber, 2010), and in more mundane experiential encounters (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Moisio, 2007). Other scholars take a more narrowly defined approach and investigate people's reactions and compensatory responses to specific stimuli in highly controlled settings. This latter body of work examines compensatory responses following a wide variety of discrepancies and self-threats (Rucker et al., 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015), with the product bearing special significance (Gao et al., 2009; Allard & White, 2015).

Upon further exploration of this literature, two main camps can be identified; each representing conceptual and methodological trends that are quite distinct from the other. Although a more detailed methodological assessment will be undertaken in Chapter 3, I will note some of the primary tendencies especially as they reflect upon underlying theoretical orientations. The first and larger group employs experiments that (usually) sample North American college students (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Yurchisin, Yan, Watchravesringkan, & Chen, 2008; Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015) or draw from US-panel data (Hoegg et al., 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Brannon, 2019; Coleman et al., 2019; Rustagi & Shrum, 2019). The core argument is that compensatory consumption is a response to threats to the self. These might be physical (i.e. height or body size) or emotional (i.e. feeling sad), individual (i.e. in relation to power or control) or social (i.e. social exclusion). They can be real (existing) or hypothetical (i.e. induced in a lab setting). In this literature tranche, compensatory consumption is depicted in negative terms. It is something to be avoided and discouraged. As part of this, these researchers offered effectively a pro-social message, helping people to avoid the behaviours they seek to discourage. They suggest that buffering modifications prior to the exposure to threat, including self-acceptance and boosts to self-esteem can buttress confidence to minimise compensatory engagements (Kim & Gal, 2014). It is important to note that these studies assume consumers engage in a cognitive elaboration of their situation and options; a point that will be revisited in later sections of this thesis.

The second tranche examines compensatory consumption from a phenomenological and experiential perspective. Reflecting these paradigmatic commitments, interviews and case studies are often preferred. Sampling is more diverse. US, UK and Brazilian populations form the core of the samples (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Moisio, 2007; Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016). As is common in phenomenological studies, scholars elicit personally meaningful stories and individual narratives from respondents to help them understand the enactment of compensation within the specific context experienced by the consumer. These qualitative studies emphasise the processual

nature of compensatory consumption, which is a marked contrast to the idea that it is a single act or behavioural response as is more common in laboratory research. Reflecting the ontological assumptions embodied in interpretive consumer research (i.e. ontological plurality and social construction), compensatory consumption is articulated as a constellation of practices and includes a variety of different behavioural outcomes and positive as well as negative consequences.

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

2-C. Branching out to the distal literature

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

Starting from the negative end of the continuum, *compulsive buying* is a chronic form of compensatory consumption, capturing behaviours that are unplanned, immediate (Rook, 1987), habitual, persistent, and difficult to stop (Amos et al., 2014); often resulting in guilt, post-purchase

regret, hiding, arguments (Horváth, Adigüzel, & van Herk, 2013; Bushra & Bilal, 2014), and leading to various socio-economically and/or psychologically disruptive consequences (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992). These behaviours tend to be driven predominantly by recurrent anxieties, prolonged unhappiness, and a perceived sense of deprivation (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; Verplanken & Sato, 2011). The latter includes remorse, financial hardship and strained relationships (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989).

The onset of compulsive buying disorder is usually during adolescence (Black, 2007), often following disruptive experiences (Benmoyal-Bouzaglo & Moschis, 2009). It is especially prevalent among young adults (Brougham, Jacobs-Lawson, Hershey, & Trujillo, 2011). In a longitudinal study, Brook, Zhang, Brook, and Leukefeld (2015) found significant effects of depression, earlier adult impulse buying, illicit drug use and symptoms of ADHD on compulsive buying tendency. In comparison to the general population, compulsive buyers tend to exhibit lower self-esteem and self-control, higher levels of anxiety and depression, greater emotional instability and social maladjustment (Tommasi & Busonera, 2012; Achtziger, Hubert, Kenning, Raab, & Reisch, 2015), obsessive tendencies (D'Astous, 1990; Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), extreme positive and negative moods (Faber & Christenson, 1996), and tend to be materialistic (Mueller et al., 2011) and narcissistic (Rose, 2007).

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

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

Addictive consumption – used in a broad sense, rather than in conjunction to the consumption of addictive substances (Alamar & Glantz, 2006) – is linked to compulsive buying. Scholars often use the terms interchangeably (Scherhorn, Reisch, & Raab, 1990; Faber, Christenson, De Zwaan, & Mitchell, 1995). There are, however, distinguishing features that deserve greater recognition. Compulsive buying tends to entail external pressures that force individuals to act outside of their control and against their will. For instance, even if only accompanying a friend to a casino, a compulsive gambler will likely be unable to resist the urge to play, despite all reason (Jiménez-Murcia et al., 2015). By contrast, addictive consumption tends to begin as a normal behaviour that may become increasingly harmful (Grover et al., 2011), but never reaches a stage that is entirely above and beyond the individual's conscious reason and control (Elliott et al., 1996). In this sense, addicted consumers represent a more extreme point along the normal consumption continuum (D'Astous, 1990).

Grover et al. (2011) researching the process that takes individuals from benign to excessive consumption, suggest that above and beyond the physical and psychological dispositions central to addiction, environmental triggers are significant. These include social cues and commercial marketing, which accentuate the benefits and downplay the problems associated with excessive consumption.

Stress, anxiety, depression and revenge are commonly cited antecedents associated with addictive consumption (Elliott et al., 1996). Addictive buyers may have suffered a distortion in their autonomy during their lives (Scherhorn et al., 1990), with addiction rooted in experiences of limited control and a prolonged lack of power (Elliott et al., 1996). While similar to compulsive buying, the consequences associated with addictive consumption are mostly negative, some positive linkages have been documented. For instance, addictive consumption can repair short-term mood or represent a socially acceptable alternative for other addictive behaviours (Elliott et al., 1996).

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

While some consider compulsive and impulsive buying tendencies as points on a continuum, evidence suggests that they are distinct entities statistically, conceptually and emotionally (Flight,

Rountree, & Beatty, 2012). Nor should we consider impulse buying as interchangeable with unplanned purchase (Xiao & Nicholson, 2013). Not all unplanned purchases are impulse buys (Rook, 1987). Unplanned purchases tend to emerge when the customer is unfamiliar with the store's layout or is under time pressure. Impulse buying, on the other hand, embodies an irresistible urge to spontaneously purchase (Shoham & Bren   , 2003).

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

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

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

The next widely investigated concept is *conspicuous consumption*. Scholarship in this vein is deeply indebted to Veblen (1899), extending his initial focus on the upper classes and the *nouveau riche* to focus on the performance of symbolically conspicuous consumption across all social strata. Given the

outward social motivations underlying conspicuous consumption, socially valorised and culturally specific status symbols (Veblen, 1899; Gabriel & Lang, 2006) provide a vehicle to mark group affiliation, social position and prestige (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Mugge, Schifferstein, & Schoormans, 2006; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010).

In large part attributable to the baby boomers, conspicuous consumption became a middle class phenomenon during the 1980s. Underwriting this was a lay belief in the idea that increased material possessions would elevate social standing and hopefully happiness (Carver & Baird, 1998; Kasser, 2002; Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Beyond the middle classes, recent work finds less affluent individuals and families and those populating emerging economies engaging in conspicuous purchases, especially in terms of seeking luxury products (Charles, Hurst, & Roussanov, 2009; Hamilton, 2009; Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). Psychologically speaking, antecedents include self-esteem, self-image (Zheng, Baskin, & Peng, 2018), social status and popularity (Shukla & Sharma, 2009), power distance belief (Cui, Fam, Zhao, Xu, & Han, 2019), as well as attachment and parental caring during adolescence (Gudmunson & Beutler, 2012).

Traditionally, conspicuous consumption centred around luxury goods (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Majic & Majic, 2011). More recently, it has been expanded to cover appeals to reference groups. In this move, debates manifest a shift from materialistic practices to those that can be conspicuous but conspicuous in a non-materialistic sense such as pro-social behaviour (Johnson & Tariq, 2013) or sustainable consumption (Etta, Nai-Chi, & Chih Ping, 2008; Prothero et al., 2011; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). Consumers' personal aspirations tend to play a further role. Intrinsically motivated individuals, that is, those for whom goal attainment provides a source of meaning, enjoyment and satisfaction, are more likely to seek luxury goods for quality-driven purposes and self-directed pleasure. Those with extrinsic aspirations whose primary motivation derives from others' praise and external reward are more likely to pursue luxury merchandise for conspicuous reasons (Truong, 2010; Landis & Gladstone, 2017). Despite these general categorisations, rather than consistently clinging to one or the other forms of motivation, customers frequently find themselves oscillating between the two poles (Hudders, 2012; Ehnrooth & Gronroos, 2013).

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

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

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

An additional category of compensatory consumption that emerged in recent decades and remains under-explored is *retail therapy* (J. Lee & Marcketti, 2017). As a term, it is used interchangeably with self-gifting. As a practice, it connotes an attempt to alleviate negative mood states that are relatively mild and temporary in nature (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). A point of divergence here is that self-gifting entails the often premeditated consumption of specific products and services (Mick & Demoss, 1990); retail therapy, on the other hand, is a series of shopping engagements elicited by contexts and situations (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). Nonetheless, research on retail therapy is scarce, but it has secured attention in the popular press and practitioner-oriented outlets (Rick, Pereira, & Burson, 2014).

2-D. Towards a holistic view: Antecedents, goals, behavioural manifestations and consequences

In order to increase our understanding of compensatory consumption, it is essential that we organise the antecedents, motivations, behavioural manifestations and consequences in a systematic fashion. Table 2.3 provides a summary. The information presented highlights important trends that have not been previously linked in such a comprehensive fashion. Two important points should be noted. First, “compensatory consumption” is not included as a separate construct. This is consistent with our

argument that it reflects a constellation of practices united under one umbrella. Second, we emphasise the unique and distinguishing features that characterise each of the compensatory forms.

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

TABLE 2.3. Antecedents, behavioural manifestations and consequences underlying compensatory consumption.

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

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

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

The second form of antecedents, that is, triggers represent factors that are more immediate threats to a sense of self (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, et al., 2015), self-confidence (Gao et al., 2009), identity and self-worth (Dalton, 2009; Coleman & Williams, 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Stuppy, Paolacci, & Ordabayeva, 2014). In contrast to predispositions which reflect more stable and enduring attributes, triggers are shorter term and their impact chronologically limited. Among these, a variety of positive and negative emotional reactions have been registered, including celebratory and rewarding sensations in response to personal success or accomplishment (Clarke & Mortimer, 2013), insecurity (Rucker et al., 2014), sadness (Garg & Lerner, 2013), boredom (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), a desire for fantasy and escapism (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), and other less stable and more temporary emotional deficits (Woodruffe, 1997). Socio-contextual variables also prevail. These include exposures to difficult situations, such as breaking up from a romantic relationship or losing a job (Gaviria & Bluemelhuber, 2010), facing significant life status changes and unfamiliar conditions (Yurchisin, Ruoh-Nan, Watchravesringkan, & Chen, 2006), or dealing with suboptimal levels of power and control (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Rucker, 2009; Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Echo Wen, Vohs, et al., 2014). Further contextual motivations may include store settings (Mohan et al., 2013), social influence (Rook, 1987), and coping with natural disasters (Sneath, Lacey, & Kennett-Hensel, 2009).

The relationship between predispositions and triggers is important to appreciate and can be illustrated as follows. Imagine a person who has low self-esteem, is easily frustrated and irritable, and

tends towards depression. They may not necessarily engage in compensatory consumption unless there was an external stimulus, threat or *trigger* foregrounding their negative feelings and sparking a consumption cycle. On the other hand, once elicited by a trigger, the predisposition may make people more susceptible to compensatory engagements. As an example, let us imagine Sarah, who works at a supermarket, finds her tasks repetitive and her daily life boring, doesn't have many friends, and often feels down. She is somewhat overweight and is unhappy with her appearance. On her way out at the end of the day, she passes by a clothing store showcasing a large photo display of a beautiful, thin and confident-looking model in a spring-like surrounding wearing an attractive outfit. Before she knows it, she wonders into the store and buys the entire outfit, despite being late with her rent. She goes home, struggling with her guilt and remorse, realises that the clothes may not even fit her, wonders how she will get the money together to cover her rent, and ends up throwing the shopping bag in her closet where it will remain untouched for weeks. In Sarah's example, her low self-esteem and recurrent anxieties can be viewed as predispositions. On the other hand, seeing the image of the model served as the trigger that sparked the sequence of compensatory events. Should she not have noticed the window display, perhaps she may not have pursued her purchases.

Let us consider another example that represents a different scenario. Brian is a banker who just began working at a new firm a few months ago. He enjoys buying high status and quality merchandise and appreciates receiving compliments from his friends on his fashion style. He used to buy more things but having just moved to a big city where life is more expensive, he needs to economise. Upon arriving at the office one morning, he pulled up as usual in his three-year-old BMW to his parking spot. He noticed that Mike, one of his colleagues, had a new car and was showing it off to others arriving. It was a Porsche. The exact model that Brian had his eyes on for months but knew he couldn't afford for the time being. He was hoping to buy it should he receive a nice bonus at the end of the year, but it was only March. He also went to take a closer look at Mike's car, and it was glamorous. He kept thinking about it for the rest of the day. He did several Internet searches during his breaks, checking out different models, engines and interiors. As it was a Friday, he thought perhaps he could swing by the nearby dealership just to check the car out. He paid them a visit the next morning, and they had a great deal on offer exactly for the car he wanted, with even more extras than Mike's model. His BMW was getting old anyway, and he would have been thinking of replacing it soon. Brian took care of the loan and the paperwork, he was thrilled, couldn't wait to go back and pick up his new treasure in a few days. He was already thinking about making plans with his friends the following weekend, he couldn't wait to show his new car around. In Brian's example, the trigger was seeing Mike's car, and the predisposition came from his general conspicuous tendency and preoccupation with social image. These were threatened by Mike's appearance with the new and highly desirable status symbol in turn sparking an imbalance, which was eventually restored by pursuing the car the next day.

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

What this emergent body of work suggests is that by bringing individuals' self-view to the surface, and thus prompting reflection upon physical attributes like height or body size that tap into enduring, private and stable aspects of the self, compensatory tendencies can be primed (Kim & Rucker, 2012). And based on the information presented in the Table 2.3, the potential additive effect of predispositions and triggers may be more pronounced in the case of the negative, compulsive and addictive behaviours than for more positive and therapeutic practices. Nevertheless, while this differential emerged on the basis of the reviewed work, it is unclear how exactly the interaction may play out in real-life settings, warranting further research.

The next element in the table concerns the goals that accompany antecedents and drive engagement in the particular behavioural pursuit. In the case of more negative compulsive and addictive behaviours, these tend to be personal in nature, targeting psychological and emotional benefits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), mood repair (Elliott et al., 1996) or an enhanced personal appearance (Trautmann-Attmann & Johnson, 2009). Towards the right side of the table, a combination of needs become influential, blending personal needs with others that aim to fulfil social and interpersonal desires. In contrast with the compulsive and addictive shoppers' general aim to fill a void (Sohn & Choi, 2014; Spinella et al., 2014), the personal needs of impulsive, conspicuous and therapeutic consumers are geared towards rewarding and uplifting sensations (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Amel, Dani El Kebir, & Elyas, 2014), as well as the attainment of higher order needs (Hausman, 2000). Sharing and social aspects become prevalent, with a strong focus on achieving social standing and prestige (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010), socialisation and group affiliation (Mugge et al., 2006), and other socially-orientated benefits (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2014).

Behavioural manifestations and consequences also show differential patterns. On the negative side, given that the behaviour does not meet the underlying needs, relapses into subsequent addictive and compulsive engagements are frequent, ultimately forming a cyclical pattern (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Even when the behaviour starts out as normal, it often spirals into chronic forms. Given this, it becomes incrementally disruptive to the individual's functioning (Horváth et al., 2013; Achtziger et al., 2015).

Compulsive and addictive consumers exhibit some tendency to indifference regarding the product, as their whole endeavour is centred around the purchase itself and the desired emotional and psychological benefits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992).

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

Building on our extensive review, the following definition is proposed, building on the earlier definition, which incorporates a more comprehensive view of compensatory consumption and thus better accounts for the complexities of this practice than prior conceptualisations. In comparison to the above definition, this present one is more comprehensive and elaborate as it accounts for a continuum of behaviours rather than a single form; embraces a processual orientation that captures the role of antecedents; and differentiates between various behavioural manifestations and consequences:

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

2-E. A fresh look at compensatory consumption – Compensation or compromise?

The previous section presented the main components underlying compensatory consumption and summarised the primary differences that characterise the positive and the negative poles along the compensatory consumption continuum. To take research on compensatory consumption in new and potentially fruitful directions, we need to briefly return to the seminal work by Gronmo (1988). He

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

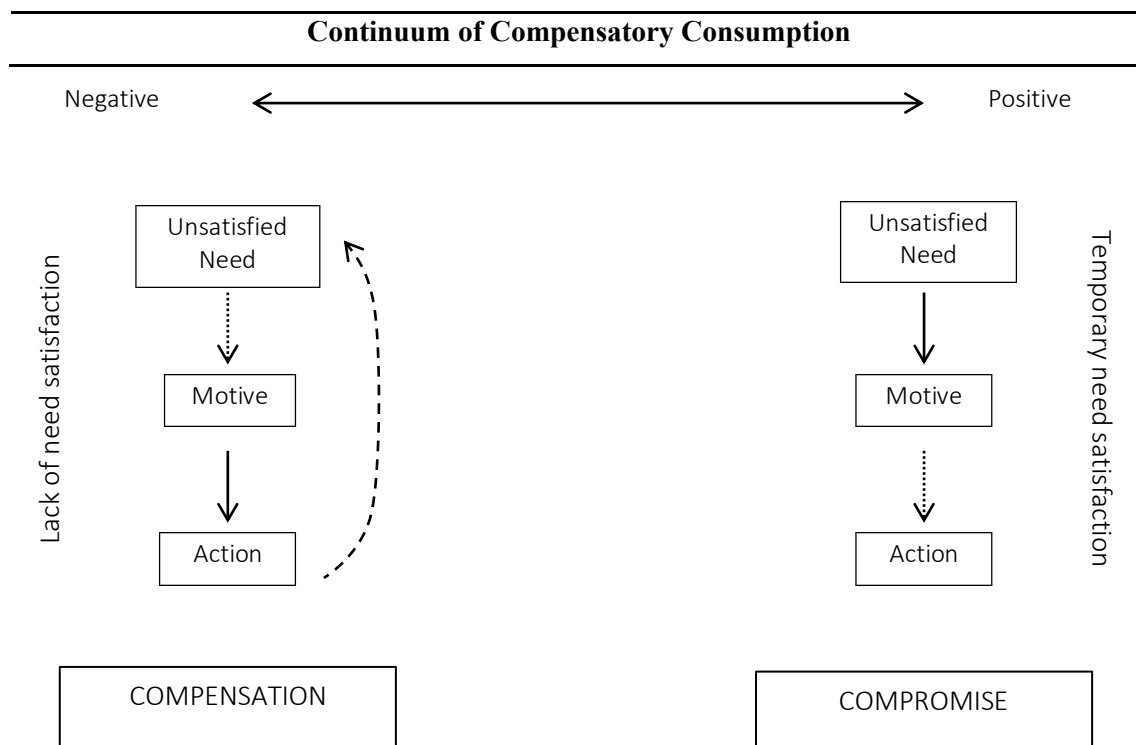
Parallels may be drawn between Gronmo's (1988) theory of need satisfaction and the review in Table 2.2. More specifically, the negative or left side of the table representing compulsive and addictive consumers can be related to the compensatory consumption form incorporating the need – motive inconsistency in Gronmo (1988)'s work. Being unaware of the real need, these individuals often turn to consumption in order to fill a lack in their lives, hoping to achieve positive outcomes. Yet the sought-after goods remain unused or returned, various negative consequences are likely to follow, and as the deeply ingrained real need persists, the process does not result in need satisfaction. This is a trigger for a new compensatory cycle. The compensation process – not a single episode – begins again.

In contrast, the positive or right side of the table corresponding to the more therapeutic consumption forms can be paralleled with Gronmo's motive – action inconsistency. Being more conscious of the real need, these people turn to consumption to fill a specific lack in their lives. But, given the resource poverty to which they are exposed, it ends up being an alternative to the real need. Compensation processes are therefore largely diachronic in nature. Furthermore, they are practices sometimes underwritten by a logic of compromise, at least for some consumers.

With this insight in mind, an important tentative distinction is proposed here between the two consumption styles which must be accounted for conceptually and studied in much greater depth empirically. In particular, while the behaviour of individuals at the negative end of the proposed continuum does largely reflect compensatory practice, the behaviour of others at the more positive end appears to reflect a slightly different process. These consumers recognise the real need at hand but cannot obtain it. Instead they find an alternative source to address their wish, lack, desire, or other motivation. Despite not being fully satisfied with their consumption outcome; they are likely to achieve at least temporary satisfaction. This is a marked contrast to their compulsive counterparts who experience no such resolution. Given the decisive process that results in settling for an alternative, it

may be more accurate to think of these latter behaviours as a form of *compromise* rather than compensation. A brief overview extending Gronmo (1988)'s theory to reflect upon these ideas can be found in Figure 2.1. In the figure, solid lines represent consistency between the constructs they connect, while dotted lines represent inconsistency.

FIGURE 2.1. Applying Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction to the continuum of compensatory consumption.



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

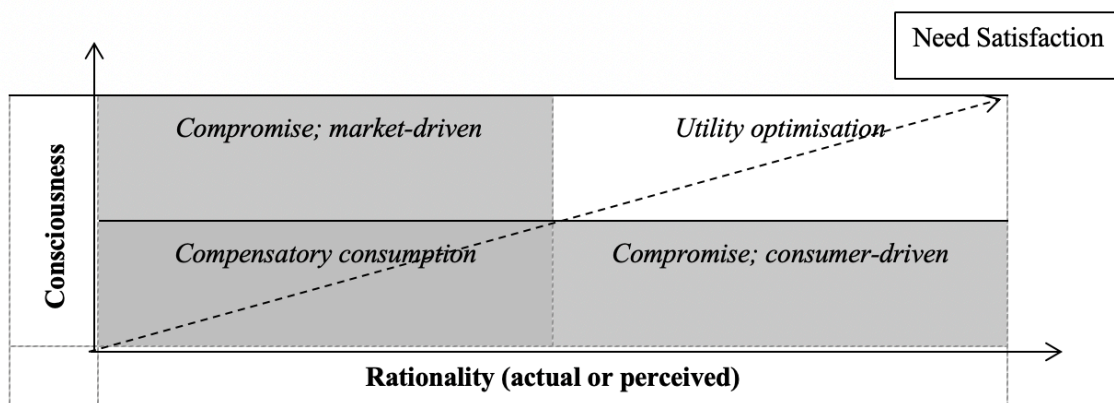
As a counterpoint, imagine Mike, who just received positive news about his promotion, and invited his friend out for dinner to celebrate. On his way home from work, he learns that his friend is out of town on a job-related assignment. Dinner plans are scuppered. Looking up and seeing a Starbucks, whilst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

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

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

Merging the reviewed material on need satisfaction and compromise, Figure 2.2 is provided to facilitate further conceptual discussion and empirical exploration. The vertical axis represents the level of consciousness characterising the consumer's behaviour, while the horizontal axis corresponds to their level of rationality. Here I reflect upon Markin (1979)'s work which attributes little value to the rational / irrational debate, and instead encourages scholars to "explore the more legitimate and concomitantly more manageable psychological issues of how consumers rationalise their behaviour" (p. 317). Consequently, a dual approach to incorporate rationality is adopted; one that concerns the actual scenario and corresponds to real cognitive states, and another that concerns the perceived scenario and captures states of mind achieved following a process of rationalisation.

FIGURE 2.2. The extent of consciousness and rationality within the theoretical orbit of compensatory and compromisory consumption.



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

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

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

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

2-F. Summary and inferences for forthcoming study

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to assess the present state of research on compensatory consumption. First, I offered a theoretical overview of the focal concept, which was complemented by a review of existing empirical work. Then the distal literature was consulted to establish a continuum of behaviours under the auspices of a compensatory umbrella. I advocated a processual orientation, capturing antecedents, behavioural manifestations and consequences associated with each compensatory form. I expanded upon Gronmo (1988)’s theory of need satisfaction, introducing a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. Finally, I offered a model to map different compensatory and compromisory consumption forms as a function of consumer rationality and consciousness.

Several key points emerged throughout this review chapter that will serve as the base for the present research and will guide the empirical study and analyses. My research orientation is exploratory, with an aim to reveal detailed descriptions of compensatory engagements from within the daily lives of individuals. Consequently, my intention is not to formulate specific testable hypotheses that are customary in research embracing more positivist traditions. Instead, I will identify some general

questions on the basis of the conceptual gaps, which will be used to inform methodological choices and subsequent analyses and are discussed below. Methodological details will be discussed further in chapter 3. The following set of questions will be explored throughout the present study:

1) *How is the process of compensatory consumption experienced within the everyday lives of individuals?*

Throughout the chapter, I advocated a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption. This processual orientation accounted for pre- and post-consumption periods, and captured antecedents, behavioural acts and consequences. Prior work has often portrayed compensatory consumption as a single isolated behaviour associated with an independent event like purchasing a pair of jeans or buying a particular music album (Paim, 1995; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). This is a limitation because the pre- and post-acquisition periods during a compensatory process are often more meaningful for individuals than the single act of purchase (Fournier & Guiry, 1993). A particularly interesting area for further research would concern the interaction between the two forms of antecedents, predispositions and triggers. This has not been examined in prior work and would have the potential to reveal useful insights.

2) *What is the role of context in compensatory consumption?*

In the chapter, I emphasised the importance of contextual influences on compensatory engagements, moving beyond the orientation of many studies that focus on personal attributes while neglecting socio-contextual factors (Garg & Lerner, 2006; Gao et al., 2009; Kim & Gal, 2014). This point is important given that the *interaction* between dispositional and situational influences was suggested to have the largest explanatory power in unravelling compensatory tendencies (Amos et al., 2014). With this aim in mind, as will be elaborated upon at length in Chapter 3, qualitative methods and phenomenological interviews are pursued as they are well suited to address contextual aspects. Via eliciting personally meaningful stories and narratives from respondents, these forms of inquiry will reveal the enactment of compensation within the specific context as experienced by the individual. Phenomenological interviews within the compensatory consumption literature are scarce, limiting our understanding of compensatory engagements within the everyday lifeworld of individuals.

3) *Does a continuum of compensatory consumption behaviours exist?*

Compensatory consumption in the present chapter was conceptualised as an umbrella term that unites a constellation of practices along a continuum. Prior research frequently defined the term in a more generalised fashion, disregarding the variation across the different behavioural manifestations. This is a shortcoming in that such a view tends to accentuate the negative consequences derived from compensatory engagements, at the expense of recognising their potential for positive outcomes and

associations. Along the same lines, many studies – particularly those embracing experimental traditions – position compensatory consumption in a rather negative light. However, what might look like negative consequences through the narrow empirical window offered by unnatural laboratory settings, may not be understood as such by the consumer or when interpreted against the tapestry of their everyday lifeworld. Reflecting this, a growing amount of evidence portrays compensatory consumption as a regular consumer activity (Grunert, 1994; Woodruffe, 1997) that should be viewed as an extension of normal consumption behaviours (Gardner, 1985; D'Astous, 1990; Elliott et al., 1996). Consistently with these latter ideas, and present research will explore compensatory occurrences within everyday experiential encounters and examine whether a continuum of behaviour exists as proposed.

4) What role does compromise play in the everyday lives of consumers?

Earlier in the chapter, I introduced a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise and offered a model that mapped different types of compensatory and compromisory consumption by the extent of consumer rationality and consciousness. The core idea centres around the recently coined term ‘compromising consumer’ (Tadajewski, 2016). Compromise is envisioned to occur either by market-driven or by consumer-driven motivations, as outlined in Figure 2.2, and is hypothesised to vary as a function of consumer rationality and consciousness. Given the general lack of empirical work in the area of consumer compromise, these ideas need to be explored further in empirical work to examine how they occur in practice and in everyday scenarios. A particularly interesting area for further investigation would be the extent of rationalisation and its role in justifying compensatory and compromisory engagements.

In order to address these research areas, I will engage in a relatively broad exploration of compensatory consumption experiences that build on personal stories, experiential accounts and stories concerning everyday shopping encounters. Methodological choices are made to account for the above conceptual gaps. First, they involve regular consumption encounters that reveal important aspects about the lifeworld of the participant. Second, they elicit memorable engagements and detailed personal descriptions that reflect upon the entire compensatory process, capturing the period that precedes the act of consumption as well as the one that follows it. Third, the consumption experience is explored from the perspective of the individual, and within the context in which it arises. Finally, via employing appropriate tools, the present research progresses towards a more comprehensive understanding of the distinction between compensation and compromise.

In conclusion, the present chapter addressed on-going debates in the field of compensatory consumption research and has complemented the available literature in a substantive fashion. By differentiating between compensatory and compromisory consumption, I developed and deepened our conceptual understanding of this important and still under researched area. These ideas necessitate further corroboration and will be addressed and developed throughout the interviews and the empirical

component of the current thesis. Building on this critical review, in the next chapter, I turn to elaborating upon the methodological orientations that will be engaged in for the purposes of the current research.

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

3-A. Chapter outline

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive critical review of compensatory consumption, outlined representative conceptual and methodological frameworks, highlighted conceptual gaps and theoretical limitations, and identified key areas to be addressed by the present thesis. Building on this review, Chapter 3 will be devoted to the positioning of the current empirical work and appropriate methodological stance taken. The chapter will begin with a brief reiteration of available scholarly research assembled in Chapter 2, paying close attention to their methodological orientations. This phase will enable the identification of limitations that characterise the compensatory consumption literature, with the key emphasis placed here on the heavy representation of positivist and experimental research at the expense of interpretive scholarship; a divide that corresponds to a more general debate within broader consumer research. Building on this material, I introduce and briefly review two research traditions – interpretive consumer research and social constructivism, highlighting certain complementary benefits they provide for exploring different areas of consumer research, including compensatory and compromised consumption.

The remaining part of the chapter will focus on the current study and its methodological directions. This stage will entail the identification of the key paradigms to be engaged with, provide an outline of general methodological orientations, and review the specific tools employed. In particular, I elaborate on the philosophical and research foundations underlying phenomenological analyses. This phase is important given its role in justifying the methodological selection, guiding the process of problem formulation, shaping the research questions, informing the search for appropriate methods and instruments, and enlightening subsequent analysis (Huff, 2009; Twining et al., 2017). In terms of specific research tools, I offer a detailed outline for the phenomenological interview method. Finally, I conclude the chapter by specifying additional methodological details to orient the empirical phase of the current thesis.

3-B. Overall justification and general positioning of current thesis

3-B.1. Methodological limitations of existing scholarship

The literature review (Chapter 2) and the summary presented in Table 2.2 provided an overview of the empirical and data driven work available in the area of compensatory consumption. Based on this information, certain observations can be made that have direct implications for the present study. As noted in chapter 2 most notably, scholars contributing to this literature can be divided into two groups. The larger group includes researchers whose work relies on laboratory experiments mostly with American student samples (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et

al., 2015), while the smaller group represents scholars whose research embraces phenomenological and experiential perspectives with more diverse populations (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Moisio, 2007; Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016).

A critical assessment of the methodological orientations represented in the area of compensatory consumption, and in particular the domination of studies using experimental designs, highlight several limitations as well as raise a number of concerns. First, compensatory consumption is a complex phenomenon that entails personally-driven, emotionally charged and only partially conscious processes – all of which are difficult to reproduce within laboratory boundaries (Ariely, 2008; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Similarly, while some of the experiments concern scenarios that are concrete enough to envision in reality, such as height (Stuppy et al., 2014), relative power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008) or clothing size (Hoegg et al., 2014), many others involve experiences that are more abstract and complex, like the concept of social exclusion (Echo Wen, Jing, & Ying, 2014; Echo Wen, Vohs, et al., 2014). In this latter scenario, the within laboratory setup and artificially manipulated behavioural responses may be conceivably different from experiencing social exclusion in real life, in a way that for instance Hamilton and Catterall (2006b) depict based on their in-depth interviews with individuals in poverty. In fact, Hamilton (2009) stresses that “it is only by highlighting their [the participants’] stories that we can really understand the full consequences of what it means to live in a consumer culture” (p. 40), and capture the lived experience of marketplace exclusion faced by consumers living in poverty.

Comparable observations can be made about products, brands and services that in experimental settings frequently translate to hypothetical scenarios and artificial fabrications (Hoegg et al., 2014). Following these experiments, it remains unclear how individuals would react to situations that entail well-known and popular trademarks. As an illustration for this, in their research exploring a sample of prestige versus mid-range automobile consumer preferences, Schembri et al. (2010) demonstrated variations in brand preference that surfaced via the narrative analysis employed in the study, yet may have remained hidden if using experimental conditions. For instance, one of the study participants who just purchased a Ford four-wheel drive family car admitted that as a business owner, he prefers to drive his BMW given its signal of success and prestige, which – as he claims – is important to maintain desirable client perceptions.

Second, laboratory studies tend to focus on a single act or behavioural response during the sole phase of acquisition (i.e. as a static snapshot). This poses a limitation because the pre- and post-acquisition periods during a compensatory process are often more meaningful for individuals than the act of purchase (Fournier & Guiry, 1993; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). As an example, in order to show that self-acceptance may reduce individuals’ compensatory tendencies, Kim & Gal (2014) demonstrated that their experimental participants in the non self-acceptance condition were more likely to pay higher prices for a luxury magazine that symbolised power than for a self-help book ‘Power and influence for dummies’, after prompted to recall a power deficit experience. The authors argue that self-acceptance

enables individuals to resolve the self-deficit associated with lack of power, and in turn they will be more likely to engage in adaptive as opposed to compensatory consumption. On the one hand, this study illustrates well the utilisation of hypothetical scenarios that tends to be a general characteristic of experimental work. On the other hand, the study also provides a good example to highlight the focus on purchase intention – in this case of a magazine that serves as a power symbol, while neglecting pre- and post-purchase experiences.

Naturally, moving beyond the acquisition phase of consumption practice is somewhat difficult to accomplish within the laboratory setting. Yet such a shift would be highly desirable for one simple reason. What might look like negative consequences through the empirical window offered by the unnatural setting of the lab, may not in fact be understood as such by the consumer or when interpreted against the tapestry of their everyday life and corresponding behaviours within the lifeworld – the often complex, nuanced, and multi-faceted lifeworld we all occupy.

Third, experiments tend to assume that individuals are generally rational agents. A good example comes from the notion of adaptive compensatory consumption that suggests that certain preventive measures enable individuals to shield themselves from the otherwise negative consequences of compensatory conduct (Kim & Gal, 2014). This hinges on the idea of a very rational consumer; rational enough to carefully evaluate their actual worth as distinct from their irrational critique of themselves. Yet there is ample evidence indicating that many times consumers do not act out of rational considerations and instead are driven by emotions and impulse (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In fact, using the diagram in Figure 2.2, I illustrated that different behaviours entail different levels of conscious awareness, rationality and rationalisation; a point that has important implications for subsequent methodological choices.

Finally, as a by-product of taking a snapshot approach to consumer decision-making, the vast majority of existing studies focus on exploring the influence of dispositional traits on compensatory behaviours, while neglecting other potentially important factors, including product-specific and contextual considerations. Previous research indicates that the interaction between dispositional and contextual factors tend to have the largest explanatory power in predicting compensatory tendencies, at least in the case of impulse purchases (Amos et al., 2014). Correspondingly, research that considers the simultaneous impact of personal and contextual factors would be particularly advantageous and should be pursued. A more inclusive approach would also enable a better understanding of the extent to which anti-consumption or non-consumption may be relevant in the area of compensatory and compromisory consumption. Various studies – including Buchanan-Oliver and Savage (2006) and Nixon and Gabriel (2016) – suggest that choosing not to consume a product can be just as significant in terms of defining self-identity as choosing one.

Alongside the broader array of experimental work, there exists a smaller set of research on compensatory consumption that embraces phenomenological approaches. The aim of this body of work is to elicit personally meaningful stories and individual narratives from respondents that help understand the enactment of compensation within the specific context experienced by the consumer (Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Moisio, 2007; Gaviria & Bluemelhuber, 2010). These interpretive studies are particularly important given their emphasis on the processual nature of compensatory consumption, as emphasised in Chapter 2. Furthermore, this body of work recognises that compensatory consumption is a more common phenomenon rather than one that pertains to certain specific subgroups of the population (Elliott, 1994; Grunert, 1994). As Woodruffe (1997) explains, “compensatory consumption is probably so routine, so quotidian in the lives of many consumers, whether it be responding to the frustrations of a traffic jam by stopping off at the petrol station to buy a Mars bar, going shopping to escape the tedium of housework or buying clothes after a row with one’s partner, that it has great significance as an area of consumer (and social) research” (pp. 326). Consequently, exploring compensatory tendencies in the general public is advantageous to untangle the nuances and complexities of this set of practices and ultimately arrive at a more in-depth understanding of this lifeworld experience.

There are a few additional noteworthy limitations associated with logistical and sampling matters characterising research on compensatory consumption. For instance, the sample pool of the reviewed work predominantly represents participants coming from the US and UK. The few exceptions to this tendency come from one study employing household survey data utilising a Bolivian sample of low-income households (van Kempen, 2007), another exploring the impact of social exclusion in a sample of college students from China (Echo Wen, Jing, et al., 2014), and a final one focusing on identity building and consumption in Brazil (Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016). Similarly to other areas of consumer research whose samples are often dominated by Anglo-Saxon societies (Burton, 2009; Slater & Yanide-Soriano, 2010), it would be valuable to study compensatory consumption in a broader set of cultural settings by tapping into less widely explored societies. Increasing cultural diversity would be particularly relevant in a field like compensatory consumption, where status symbols (Gabriel & Lang, 2006) as well as relative social standing are largely culture-driven (Podoshen et al., 2014).

Finally, much of the work on compensatory consumption builds on student-based samples (Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015). This is not necessarily to say that investigating compensatory consumption in student populations is not valuable. In fact, there may be an even greater prevalence of certain types of compensatory behaviours amongst students given the resource poverty they face as mostly non-working individuals who do not earn an income. However, they do represent a particular subgroup of the larger population, for instance when compared with families with children or older age groups, which is likely to limit the transferability of the findings (Park & Lessig, 1977).

3-B.2. Paradigms – Competition or collaboration?

The methodological dichotomy eluded to above is not unique to the study of compensatory consumption, but rather has been characteristic of a larger debate within as well as outside the boundaries of marketing and consumer research (Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Belk, 2009). In fact, it taps into a higher-order discussion among scholars concerning the most appropriate paradigm to guide scientific inquiry. Generally speaking, knowledge can emerge from different sources and different scientific domains (Wilber, 1996), and can either be based on hard scientific data that consists of falsifiable theories subjected to rigorous testing (Calder & Tybout, 1987), or on mental-phenomenological science that builds on psychology and philosophy, moves beyond the sensory world, and produces interpretive knowledge that focuses on meaning and behavioural interpretation (Gregory, 2000).

The past three to four decades of consumer research witnessed an increasing opening up to interpretivist and critical paradigms (Hunt, 1991; Goulding, 1999). Starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a growing number of studies appeared in the area of marketing that followed and embraced interpretivist traditions (Ahuvia, 2005; Hamilton & Catterall, 2006a; Chipp et al., 2011; Kerrane & Hogg, 2013; Fischer, Castilhos, & Fonseca, 2014). The main trigger driving this shift was sparked by an increasing recognition that postulated consumers as not entirely rational but rather meaning-making experiential beings (Markin & Narayana, 1976; Zaltman, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Batat, 2011; Cova, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2013), with their actions often influenced by hedonic impulse rather than cognitive contemplation (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Morris, ChongMoo, & Singh, 2005; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). The Consumer Behaviour Odyssey initiated by Russel Belk (Belk, 2014) and his colleagues was a project as well as a movement that serves as a particularly memorable landmark in its representative importance to break away from positivism and the heavily experimental and survey-based orientation dominating consumer research.

Alternative paradigmatic traditions were viewed by many as desirable not only to balance the heavily positivistic literature dominating the 1970s and 1980s, but also to obtain a more comprehensive and well-rounded picture of the complex process of consumption. In this vein, studies began to involve marketers and consumers in the research process; recognised consumers as active rather than passive agents; and importantly, analysed markets from the consumer's rather than the marketer's viewpoint (Marsden & Littler, 1996). According to the assessment of Askegaard and Linnet (2011), the growing emphasis on phenomenology and the increasing tendency of consumer research to tap into the lived reality of the consumer "represented a strongly based reaction against the cognitivism of the information-processing paradigm (deemed unsuited by interpretivists as a scientific logic to study human behaviour). It was a reaction against an overly abstract representation of consumers in consumer research. [...] The re-implication undertaken by phenomenological interpretivism exemplifies the general tendency of postmodern social science to scorn totalising claims to scientific knowledge about

social life, valorising instead the ‘positioned’ researcher who creates admittedly subjective accounts and interpretations of the world” (p. 385).

Despite the increased openness towards interpretivist paradigms and the growing appreciation of their contributions and value towards understanding the lifeworld of individuals, the debate nonetheless continues. Many positivists and empiricists remain sceptical and often deny scientific consideration to interpretivist inquiry. In their view experiments, for instance, are superior to interviews given their formal rules, focus on testable hypotheses, employment of control groups, precise requirements for significance testing, and aims to reduce subjectivity; a concept very much prevalent in the interview method (Giorgi, 1997). In contrast, scholars embracing alternative paradigmatic traditions believe that while positivistic approaches and their often heavily quantitative methodological orientations may be valuable in the natural sciences, they have little to offer in the realm of social science research (Gregory, 2000), in large part because they neglect the very nature of human thought and behaviour (Zaltman, 1997). Taking this even further, Van Kaam (1966) argues that experimental designs and statistical methods “may distort rather than disclose a given behaviour through an imposition of restricted theoretical constructs on the full meaning and richness of human behaviour” (p. 14). Additional particularities associated with interpretivist and critical paradigmatic perspectives will be reviewed below.

The general position espoused in the current thesis is not to prove any paradigmatic perspective right or wrong, but rather to recognise that they represent different world views to study human phenomena (Thompson et al., 1989), with concomitant limitations. The ideas of van Manen (1990) are useful here, suggesting that “whereas natural science tends to *taxonomise* natural phenomena (such as in biology) and causally or probabilistically *explain* the behaviour of things (such as in physics), human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena (such as in literary or historical studies of texts) and at *understanding* the lived structures of meanings (such as in phenomenological studies of the lifeworld)” (p. 30). In line with social constructivist and interpretivist traditions, many researchers emphasise that different paradigmatic approaches should not be viewed in competition or ranked by superiority, but instead should be leveraged on the basis of their distinctive purpose and unique contributions to tackle different types of questions and objectives (Thompson et al., 1989; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue, there is no single truth, and thus it would be unreasonable to expect academic scholarship to converge towards a single conventional paradigm. Rather, they consider our current period to be one that is “marked by multivocality, contested meanings, paradigmatic controversies, and new textual forms. This is an age of emancipation, freedom from the confines of a single regime of truth, emancipation from seeing the world in one colour” (p. 95).

It may be useful at this point to demonstrate how these ideas may translate to practice. The following scenarios were crafted to illustrate the distinctive contributions of different research paradigms and methodological approaches and exemplify how – when used in combination – they may be able to

provide a more coherent understanding of a given topic of interest. If our aim were to understand consumer purchase intentions of Christmas presents in the absence or presence of festive stimuli (i.e. decorations or music), a well-designed experiment would suffice to provide meaningful insights. Similarly, quantitative data collection tools like surveys can be quite effective in determining the number of Christmas gifts purchased for children per household, assessing the total amount of money spent on presents during the Christmas holiday period, or the interaction of two or more specified variables. However, if we were to explore the notion of gifting and the role of Christmas presents in maintaining traditions across generations, a survey or a laboratory experiment will hardly be able to capture the complexity and subjective nature of such endeavours. In these latter situations, interpretive approaches may prove to be more advantageous and informative, given their ability to yield a rich and elaborate array of information from individual participants.

The above examples demonstrate that one paradigmatic approach is not necessarily superior to another, but rather the difference lays in their suitability to answer different types of questions. Furthermore, considering the complexity underlying consumer behaviour, these examples also show that it may in fact be advantageous – depending on the purposes and stage of development of the research problem – to utilise a combination of paradigms and methodologies, as in conjunction they may be able to provide a more coherent picture to understanding complex consumer research phenomena.

3-B.3. The interpretive direction

The above section focused on discussing relevant debates in the field of consumer research highlighting the perceived contributions of different paradigms and their ability to tackle different problems. The present section will advance to consider specific methodological orientations that are representative of contemporary consumer research scholarship. Generally speaking, different paradigms are frequently associated with different methodological preferences and techniques (Fischer, Gopaldas, & Scaraboto, 2017). Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets (2013) use the term *tradition* in reference to “a set of philosophical assumptions and associated research practices that cohere with these philosophical assumptions” (p. 20). Although no direct or definitive relationship can be established between positivism and quantitative data, positivist research aims to explain associations between events, focus on *what* happens, and decipher meaning by making inferences about mental events from quantified observations of actions, behaviours and choices (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). These engagements tend to rely on the scientific method, and employ experimental and manipulative techniques which are consistently uniform across all participating members (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In contrast, interpretive and critical paradigms recognise the existence of multiple realities, aim to answer *why* and *how* questions (Bailey, 2014), and focus on understanding how people construct their world and make sense of their own experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These latter approaches are mostly

inductive in orientation, and thus rely heavily on qualitative data collection techniques such as fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, recordings, observations and text analyses (Creswell, 2013); all presenting the researcher with a greater degree of flexibility. For instance, while surveys tend to incorporate a rigid set of questions presented in a fixed order, interviews tend to follow a protocol that comprises a list of topics for guidance. Drawing parallels between interviews and everyday conversations, Belk et al. (2013) accentuate the importance of researcher flexibility in co-constructing a dialogue that captures and is sensitive to the uniqueness of each participant. According to their argument: “you would not have conversations with different friends following the same sequence of questions with each one. Nor should you do this with different interviewees” (p. 35).

Descriptions of interpretive research methods in marketing research textbooks are frequently criticised for being overly general, presenting qualitative research as a softer, naturalistic and interpretive alternative with a purpose to complement existing quantitative tools (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Belk et al. (2013) offer a more constructive differentiation between positivist and interpretivist forms of inquiry. In particular, they conclude that interpretivist research is advantageous in that it offers rich and detailed descriptions; is contextualised and thus accounts for the greater context in which the data is collected; is situated in natural settings; and positions the researcher as a key instrument. Furthermore, interpretive forms of inquiry draw on ordinary people’s descriptions of their lifeworld, opinions and behavioural acts, and in turn rely on an implicit phenomenological understanding that per definition is unscientific from a positivist philosophical standpoint (Kvale, 1983). In contrast, the positivist paradigm concerns the pursuit of a single decipherable reality that builds on quantifiable data; is decontextualised; takes place in artificial and highly controlled settings; and ensures that the interaction between the researcher and the participant is kept to a minimum. Such a comparative assessment is useful in providing further support for the pursuit and identification of a suitable match that pairs the question and purpose of a given inquiry with the most appropriate paradigm, along with respective sampling considerations and methodological tools (Thompson et al., 1989).

3-C. Paradigmatic positioning for the study of compensatory consumption

Returning to the area of compensatory consumption, many of the ideas mentioned above resonate with the basic tenets of the current thesis and in turn anchor its methodological orientations and directions. Within the scope of existing compensatory consumption scholarship, I emphasised the limitations that derive from heavily experimental and empiricist research designs. Laboratory experiments and surveys may function well in situations that are clear and unambiguous, and where the participants are attentive, conscious and rational. Yet the vast majority of consumption hardly takes place in such fashion, as consumers are often driven by emotions and hedonic impulse (Arnould &

Thompson, 2005). Consequently, experimental scientists should account for the limited scope of their work – more so than they currently do.

Along the same lines, many of us may be driven by an instilled inclination to *appear* rational and consequently may be less likely to admit situations when in fact we are anything but (Markin, 1979). Much of the processes that underline compensatory consumption are not obvious to individuals. In contrast with earlier work exploring non-conscious and automatic influences on social judgment and behaviour, often attributing the majority of non-cognitive aspects to impulses and physiological necessities, there is a need for research and theoretical frameworks that account for a broader categorisation of motivations and goal pursuits; many of which may operate outside of consciousness (Bargh, 2002).

Clarity is also confounded as soon as we broaden the range of activities to move beyond the acquisition stage, which – as mentioned above – continues to dominate experimental research. This is especially true in the case of compensatory consumers, for whom the pre- and post-acquisition periods tend to be more meaningful than the single act of purchase (Fournier & Guiry, 1993; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), emphasising a need to embrace a processual orientation that incorporates a priori contemplation as well as a posteriori reflection. Given its complexity and longitudinal orientation, compensatory consumption may be best articulated as a constellation of practices that includes a variety of different behavioural outcomes and consequences that may dynamically evolve over time. As a final point of reflection concerning the current state of research on compensatory consumption, a further compromise undermining experimental results concerns their excessive focus on personal attributes at the expense of situational characteristics (Amos et al., 2014). In light of these shortcomings, the current study adopts the ontological position of social constructivism, and within that is situated in the theoretical orbit of interpretive consumer research.

Social constructivism is an important ontological position that places a strong emphasis on the role of social interactions and context on human thought, behaviour and learning (Jonassen, 1994). Social constructivist principles posit that behavioural acts arise out of the combined interaction between individuals and their environment. From this perspective, an individual's personality is not made up of a set of internal and consistent traits but rather derives from the person's interpretation of their own and others' behaviour within the social context (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). A key task for the social constructivist researcher is to capture the complexity of individual views (Creswell, 2013). Expanding the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), the social constructivist framework has been applied to a range of disciplines, including education (Marín, Benarroch, & Jiménez Gómez, 2000), science and technology (Lynch, 2016) and marketing and consumer behaviour (Richins, 1994).

The social constructivist ontological position has important implications for consumer research in a variety of domains. First, while recognising the importance of cognition and cognitive learning, Berger

and Luckmann (1966) also emphasise the strong emotional charge during the process of socialisation and the establishment of consumption preferences. This perspective reaches beyond the heavily cognitive orientation that dominates much of consumer research, and – as established earlier – also remains the leading conceptual and methodological approach of choice exploring compensatory consumption (Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015). Second, the social constructivist paradigm and its emphasis on *experiential* consumption brings certain more traditional perspectives to understanding consumer behaviour into question (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999; Voss et al., 2003). Third, Berger and Luckmann (1966) place particular emphasis on the relationship between human thought and the social context in which it arises, portraying common sense knowledge as “the knowledge I share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life” (p. 22). Finally, social constructivism provides a useful lens through which to explore and explain social action – as well as inaction – on the basis of meaning-making activities that permeate the everyday lives and interactions of consumers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This ontological position is particularly well-suited to study of compensatory and compromisory consumption. As emphasised throughout Chapter 2, many objects enjoy socially-granted symbolic values that make them desirable for personal and relational purposes (Gabriel & Lang, 2006), enabling individuals to mark their status and position within social hierarchies (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Pattillo-Mac Coy, 1999; Milner, 2006; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010), and in turn highlighting the importance of the greater societal and cultural setting.

Moving on from the paradigmatic positioning of compensatory and compromisory consumption towards a consideration of the specific methodological tools appropriate for the current study, the following section will be devoted to an overview of the basic principles, guidelines and processes underlying the phenomenological interview method.

3-D. Methodological positioning – Phenomenology in Consumer Research

Existential phenomenology is a research orientation that received increasing attention among consumer research scholars in recent years (Belk et al., 2013). Phenomenological analysis seeks to decipher the meaning of experience, by disclosing and elucidating the behavioural phenomenon as it is manifested to the individual (Van Kaam, 1966). According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological research refers to “the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness” (p. 40), and aims to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of meaning derived from our everyday experiences as we live them (van Manen, 1990).

The roots of phenomenology can be traced back to Husserl’s transcendental-phenomenological reduction (Schmitt, 1959). Husserl criticised the objectivist illusion embraced by positivists and empiricists who conceived the world as an objective universe of facts (Kvale, 1983). Within the realm of human experience, Husserl was interested in how people come to know their own experience with a

phenomenon well enough to identify its essential features, which in turn would *transcend* the circumstances of their appearance and thus could be shared with others (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). In order to accomplish this, people need to step outside the experience itself and enter a reflexive mode, and question all that may have previously seemed self-evident (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of phenomenological reduction is to understand the natural attitude of individuals holistically, without making generalities and abstractions (Giorgi, 1997).

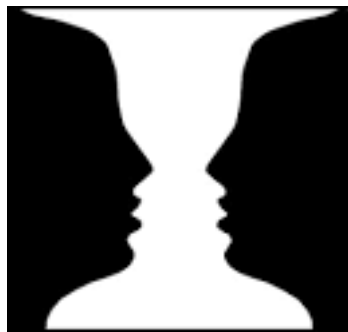
Thompson et al. (1989) contrast the phenomenologist position with the Cartesian *mechanistic* worldview in which “reality is perceived as a machine-like event determined by forces and constraints” (p. 137). The Cartesian framework embraces a dualistic ontology according to which humans exist independently from their external world, and the focus is on deciphering the underlying theoretical structures from a third-person perspective. The logic behind such research is predictive, with the ultimate goal to reduce phenomena to its component parts and quantitative dimensions. This argument feeds well into the debate between constructivist or interpretivist versus positivist paradigms discussed earlier, advocating the position that different research traditions may fulfil different purposes and objectives (Thompson et al., 1989).

In contrast, the phenomenological approach relies heavily on dialogue and open-ended questions, moves from descriptions to reflective analysis and interpretations of the participant’s primary account, and ultimately aims to unfold the meaning of experience and to provide a comprehensive description of it (Giorgi, 1985). The phenomenological method tends to incorporate three key concepts. Phenomenological research is intentional in that it builds on the experiential categories of the participants versus the conceptual categories of the researcher; is emergent in that the dialogue is participant-driven rather than based on pre-defined questions; and is hermeneutic as it captures an interactive cyclical process that relates the separate parts with the whole text (Goulding, 1999).

The seminal work of Thompson et al. (1989) on existential-phenomenology advanced our understanding of this method and its application to consumer research to a great extent. The authors emphasise the importance of research to be centred on the lifeworld of individuals; on the meaning of people’s experiences as situated in the context in which they occur; and on the understanding of the relationship between experiences and on-going life projects. They offer three metaphors that represent the key underlying premises of existential phenomenology, and in turn bring the theoretical concepts to a more practical level of understanding. The first is the *pattern* metaphor, recognising that a pattern, despite being visually distinguishable from its larger setting, cannot exist as a separate entity from the environment in which it occurs (Gibson, 1986). Similarly, existential-phenomenologists do not study individuals as separate from their environment, but instead study them in an overall totality of being-in-the-world; (Lackey, 1999). Just like a pattern, experience is situated in a given experiential context, and is described as it is *lived*.

The second is the *figure / ground* metaphor, which illustrates the duality between background and foreground depending on the focus of our perception. The core idea originates from the views of Gestalt psychology, exploring human perception and our tendency to form holistic interpretations in order to make sense of our complex and chaotic world (Bruce, Green, & Georgeson, 2003). A famous example comes from the faces-vase image based on the work of Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin (Thompson et al., 1989), where the two faces are black and the vase in the middle is white, with our perception of the whole image contingent upon our focus (image shown in Figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1. The famous Ruben's faces-vase image.



Scholars apply this metaphor to existential phenomenology via recognising that in a given experience, certain contextual aspects may stand out while others recede to the background. Thompson et al. (1989) illustrate the relevance of this metaphor using the example of a mother-child dyad in a store. Initially, the context from the mother's experience may concern the store's layout and offerings. However, as soon as the child begins to cry, these aspects recede into the background, bringing the child into the focus from the mother's perspective. There are three key takeaways based on this example and the application of this metaphor to phenomenological inquiry. Namely, one needs to recognise that experiences are dynamic, intentional, and are never independent from the background in which they occur.

The final one of the three metaphors offered by Thompson et al. (1989) is the *seeing* metaphor. The existential phenomenologist locates a person's difficulties within his or her present lifeworld rather than in their unconscious, redefining the mechanisms of repression as an existential choice. In line with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (2012, orig. 1945), lost memories reflect upon a period of life that an individual refuses to acknowledge. The figure / ground metaphor is relevant here as well, mirroring the relationship between the reflected and the un-reflected elements of an experience as being in the background versus in the foreground. The phenomenological method has the power to prompt the un-reflected elements to surface, enabling participants to create meaningful narratives that shed light on certain aspects of their behaviour, which may have been previously unexplored or insufficiently understood.

Considering the key features of existential phenomenology, the research questions aligned with this tradition tend to focus on the nature of people's lived experience rather than on some universal understanding of a given phenomenon of interest. For example, instead of trying to establish a global understanding of consumer experience associated with first time car ownership, Belk et al. (2013) recommend that in the spirit of existential phenomenology, it is more appropriate to seek "a deep understanding of what your first automobile means to you, with the 'you' here being a special focal consumer. [...] A typical 'answer' to such a question is a description of thematic patterns (e.g., automobile as freedom; automobile as extended self; automobile as sexual symbol) that relate to one another and to the overall context of the life-world, including interactions, identity, and activities" (pp. 21). The researcher's task is to gradually navigate the emphasis from the initial individual perspective to an aggregated one that ultimately enables a more structured understanding of differences (Belk, 1988; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990).

Within the area of consumer research, an increasing set of studies embrace existential phenomenology as their core method of inquiry. Examples include the use of phenomenological interviews to explore consumer experiences of identity and status incongruence (Ulver & Ostberg, 2014), the role of family environments in children's consumer socialisation (Kerrane & Hogg, 2013), consumption rituals (Johnstone & Conroy, 2005), food shopping as a form of self-expression (Woodruffe-Burton & Wakenshaw, 2011), and the temporal and focal dynamics of repeated hedonic experiences (Russell & Levy, 2012).

3-E. Methodological techniques and procedures

The aim of the present chapter thus far has been to lay down the groundwork for compensatory consumption research and situate it within a wider paradigmatic stance and methodological tradition. The present section will outline the specific methodology used for the purposes of the current study. Phenomenological interviews were chosen as the principal method of data collection. Although subject to criticism, phenomenological interviews have been used increasingly in consumer research (Myers, 1985; Stern et al., 1998; Woodruffe-Burton & Wakenshaw, 2011; Russell & Levy, 2012; Karanika & Hogg, 2013; Ulver & Ostberg, 2014), as indicated above, with several earlier studies providing suitable examples to inform the specific methodologies employed in the current work.

3-E.1. The phenomenological interview

Generally speaking, depth interviews represent one of the primary forms of data collection in interpretivist research. Their aim is to seek an in-depth understanding of a particular topic that is relevant to participants in some way, and which they are knowledgeable enough to speak about and

elaborate upon (Belk et al., 2013). Representing a particular subgroup of depth interviews, phenomenological interviews have dominated much of contemporary research within the interpretive consumer research tradition. The study adopts the format and context outlined by Thompson et al. (1989) in reference to their work on the existential-phenomenological method. The aim of this form of research is to elicit flexible and free-form first-person narratives driven by the consumer rather than the researcher, with the aim of identifying significant experiences, incidents and events, along with recurring experiential patterns within the context of the consumer's life history (Mick & Demoss, 1990). Within the auspices of social constructivism, Berger and Luckmann (1966) also advocate the use of phenomenological interviews to generate a deep understanding of individuals, and to explore the subjective experience of everyday life. Consequently, given the intentions of the current research, phenomenological interviews seem particularly well suited to explore compensatory and compromisory consumption.

3-E.1.1. The interview process

Before launching a phenomenological study, it is important to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between pursuing prior information and expertise on the focal topic yet remaining open-minded and curious towards new ideas and directions (Belk et al., 2013). While extensive literature reviews are not necessarily required as phenomenological interviews are not theory-driven, some basic understanding is beneficial in order to identify the strengths, weaknesses and important gaps that may guide the choice of topic worthy of further in-depth exploration (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). At the same time, it is important for researchers to distance themselves from the topic sufficiently to prevent imposing their own assumptions and knowledge, which in turn may risk reluctance in participants to openly share information (McCracken, 1988). As Belk et al. (2013) suggests, "it is better to appear to know too little than too much" (p. 32).

During the course of the interview, the researcher engages with the participants first-hand. Interviews often begin with grand tour questioning about the participant's background and may also include some general non-threatening topics to facilitate comfortable and open dialogue (Belk et al., 2013). Phenomenological interviews tend to rely on questions that are broad, open-ended and exploratory as opposed to closed and explanatory, in order to allow participants to freely express their viewpoint (Giorgi, 1997; Creswell, 2013). Also, questions tend to proceed from general to more specific issues to maintain a desirable flow. In line with interpretivist traditions, questions generally aim at eliciting a lengthy and detailed description of experience rather than being abstract and leading or seek to confirm any theoretical beliefs or hypotheses (Thompson et al., 1990).

Other than the opening question, many consider it advisable for the researcher to refrain from making specific a priori questions that concern the phenomenon of interest (Thompson et al., 1989).

Representing a slightly different perspective, an insightful recent contribution on this topic suggests that it may be more advantageous to enter the interview with certain research questions in mind, given that the researcher cannot be expected to abandon entirely their prior training and instead should take it into consideration (Arsel, 2017). For the purposes of the present thesis, a hybrid approach blending the two above-mentioned strategies was adopted. While participants were encouraged to elaborate freely about their consumption experiences, certain more targeted questions were applied that served a dual purpose: on the one hand they helped participants maintain their focus on topics relevant for the study, and on the other hand they assisted in ensuring that particular key areas were covered during the interview.

Although interviews share many common attributes with conversations, a key difference between the two is that in interviews the researcher directs the conversation in ways that may come across as rude in everyday situations (Belk et al., 2013). Regarding the power dynamics during the interviews, an important point should be highlighted that concerns the paradigmatic perspective engaged in the present work. On the one hand, phenomenological interviews tend to place more emphasis on the participant and less on the researcher during the dialogue, as the primary aim is centred around an in-depth understanding of individual experience within the lifeworld of the participant (Thompson et al., 1989). On the other hand, interviews conducted in line with social constructivist and post-structuralist traditions stipulate a more active role for researchers, and conceptualise meaning as co-constructed by the participant-interviewer dyad (Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009). Consequently, interview questions target not only participants' experiential accounts, but also the context in which these accounts occur. Merging the two perspectives, power can be viewed as a dynamically evolving and collaboratively negotiated concept between the interviewer and the participant, emerging in a cyclical fashion. The starting point is the experience viewed from the participant's point of view, with further prompts for clarifications regarding contextual details and positioning initiated by the interviewer.

During the course of the interview, many scholars advise against the use of *why* questions as they may be intrusive, may evoke unnecessary rationalisations, and may initiate a search for explanation and justification to single out certain aspects of the experience designated as the cause (Belk et al., 2013). However, in a recent tutorial by Arsel (2017), the author emphasises that 'why' questions can be quite effective and advantageous as long as they are employed in the right context, as they may give participants a sense of power and agency. The interview process tends to be circular, and should yield a conversation rather than a question and answer session (Thompson et al., 1989). As such, it should involve taking turns, showing interest in the other party and what they have to say, and follow a coherent flow of topics (Belk et al., 2013). Despite the generally flexible structure of interviews, some find it useful to set up an interview schedule with a tentative set of questions that would be asked in an ideal scenario in order to establish a loose agenda. Especially in the case of less experienced researchers, such a map may be helpful to reduce potential anxiety and the likelihood of reverting to closed, leading

and judgmental questions. While researchers should remain focused on the phenomenon of interest, it is important to recognise that interviews are flexible and may evolve over time, in reaction to the participants' perceptions, contributions and revelations (Kvale, 1983).

3-E.1.2. Interview questions / schedule

Towards the end of Chapter 2, four general research areas were introduced to be explored in great detail during the present thesis. The questions raised to represent the four key research areas were as follows: 1) Does a continuum of compensatory behaviours exist? 2) How is the process of compensatory engagement experienced within the everyday lives on individuals? 3) What is the role of context in compensatory endeavours? And 4) What role does compromise play in the everyday lives of consumers? A set of interview questions were crafted to address these general research areas, and to a priori ensure relevance, resulting in an interview schedule that can be found in a Table 3.1. The table also identifies links between the interview topics and the research areas explored and theoretical foundations introduced in the current thesis.

TABLE 3.1. Interview schedule.

1.	<i>Please tell me a little bit about yourself. What you do, where you are from, etc.</i>
	Establish rapport and find out general trends. It is essential for the interviewer to establish a rapport early on with the participant, and to assume the role of an active and non-directive listener (Thompson et al., 1989; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Accomplishing this requires some degree of intimacy and certain key skills that can be perfected with practice (Belk et al., 2013).
2.	<i>Do you like shopping? Could you elaborate a bit?</i>
	Obtain an overall feel for consumer style and history. This question is also useful as it captures how people view their consumption in general, before they spend time to elaborate on their experiences in greater detail.
3.	<i>I would like to ask you to take a few minutes and think about a couple of your possessions that you would consider important for you. Could you tell me their story; first one and then the other?</i> (Potential prompts: Why did you choose these possessions? What is special about them? What do they mean for you? Do they represent something positive? Something negative? What do they say about you? Can you recall the circumstances when you acquired them?)
	Obtain examples that capture the entire consumption cycle. Much of the existing research on compensatory consumption – given the domination of experimental studies noted above, focuses on the stage of acquisition while neglecting the pre- and post-consumption periods. The list of studies in Table 2.2 in Chapter 2 (pp. 25) demonstrates that there are only a few interpretivist exceptions that captures the process-like nature of consumption.

4.	<i>Now please think about a recent purchase of yours that was in some way unusual or out of the ordinary. Can you tell me about this purchase, in as great detail as possible?</i> The aim of these questions is to elicit a set of general consumption stories. Compensatory engagements are often related to special purchases that are meaningful for the participants in some way. Woodruff-Burton brings out these aspects well in her own work (Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). She also emphasises the importance of considering the overall process of consumption, as often it is more relevant for consumers than the purchase itself.
5.	<i>Think about some of your recent shopping encounters. Please think only about those that are meaningful and memorable, as opposed to everyday encounters that target groceries and other household goods. Please describe a recent positive as well as a recent negative shopping experience in detail.</i> The aim of these questions is to elicit further consumption stories. By including positive and negative encounters, the intention is to encourage participants to think about their experiences in a holistic fashion, including not just facts but also emotions and the greater context. This approach is in line with the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) that has become quite a common tool particularly in the area of service research (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Gremler, 2004; Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). Introduced originally by Flanagan (1954), this method may have a good fit in the field of consumer research as well, although it has not yet been applied in this realm. Chell and Pittaway (1998) provide a concise definition to describe the CIT, positioning it as a “qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes, or issues) identified by the respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The objective is to gain understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements” (p. 56).
6.	<i>Can you recall a recent shopping experience that you found exciting? Can you describe it in detail? What sort of a product were you seeking? Were you successful? Does such an experience occur frequently?</i> Find examples for positive emotional states during shopping. Similarly to question 5, the aim of these questions is to go beyond the rational and fact-based aspects of consumption and incorporate affective and hedonic states; which tends to be noted as prevalent in consumer engagements (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Babin et al., 1994).
7.	<i>Please describe a typical shopping experience. When are they likely to occur? How do you allocate your time for shopping? Do you go alone or with others? With what frequency do they occur?</i> Learn about individual consumption patterns. As an interesting early observation that emerged during the planning and pilot phase of the crafting of the interview schedule, a certain dichotomy became apparent. More specifically, although early on most individuals indicated that they did not enjoy shopping and considered themselves rational consumers pursuing material goods based on need, later on during the experiential stories it became apparent that their experience was not always purely rational or need-based. Hence, these questions were added to revisit the notion of general consumption styles and patterns, now that participants had the opportunity to think about their own experiences to a greater extent.
8.	<i>What do you do when something good happens? Like when you receive some good news? Can you recall a recent encounter like this?</i> Prompt for potential compensatory experiences. As outlined in Table 2.2 in Chapter 2 (pp 25), antecedents of compensatory engagements tend to include predispositions as well as triggers and may vary as a function of the motivations and subsequent manifestations. Although it is anticipated that the role of antecedents will emerge during the consumer experiences shared by

	participants throughout the interview, these questions may prompt some concrete examples, particularly in those instances when participants may be less likely to incorporate them otherwise.
9.	<i>What do you do when something negative happens? Like when you receive some bad news? Can you recall a recent encounter like this?</i> Prompt for potential compensatory experiences. The idea behind these questions is in line with the justification in question 8 above, except that here the prompt is for negative rather than positive news, events and occurrences.
10.	<i>Do you buy things for other people? Can you describe such an instance?</i> Inquire about gifting behaviours. Gifting behaviours serve as a particularly interesting element of compensatory engagements (Mick & Demoss, 1990; Weisfeld-Spolter, Gould, & Thakkar, 2006; Ward & Thuhang, 2007; Heath et al., 2011), and the aim here is to understand the role and importance of self-gifting and buying gifts for others more fully.
11.	<i>Now please think about a possession or something that you would like to have (or do) but you haven't yet. Why did you choose this product or service? How does it represent you? Are you likely to obtain it / experience it? If so, when?</i> Learn about aspirations associated with products. Despite the rich literature focusing on special possessions, aspirations, and general value in consumer research (Otero-López & Villardefrancos, 2015; Weisfeld-Spolter, Rippé, & Gould, 2015; Ferreira & Scaraboto, 2016), there is limited work that explores the role of desired possessions within the greater context of compensatory engagements. The aim of this question is to fill this gap in the literature and explore similarities and differences between regular and aspirational material goods in compensatory experiences.
12.	<i>Let's talk a bit about your closet. Could you please describe it for me? Some people go through their closet on a regular basis. Does it resemble you? Please tell me a little bit about a typical lifecycle of your possessions.</i> Obtain further information regarding the post-consumption period as well as about the lifecycle of possessions. The aim here is to close the consumption loop and explore what happens to items after the purchase stage. Previous literature identified certain extreme cases, including leaving items unopened in one's closet for long periods, in turn indicating more compulsive tendencies (Rook, 1987; Yi, 2012; Harnish & Bridges, 2015). These questions aim to explore the lifecycle of possessions in greater detail, and also understand consumer experience at the different endpoints of the compensatory consumer scale (as identified in Table 2.2. (pp. 25) more fully.
13.	<i>Think a little bit about your life currently. Are you happy with where you are? If you could change three things, what may they be?</i> Learn about general life satisfaction vs. lacks. This is a relatively general question and is not intended to contribute extensively to the discourse on compensatory consumption per se. However, particularly given the identified importance of certain predispositions in terms of their impact towards compensatory tendencies, it is useful to have a general understanding of how people envision their happiness and what are some factors – in their own elaboration – that may contribute to their overall sense of well-being.

14.	<i>Now think a little bit about yourself in 5 to 10 years time. How do you see yourself? What are you likely to be doing? What things will you have? How are these similar to or different from the ones you have now?</i> Learn about future life aspirations and the place of objects in future life. Similarly to question 13, the aim here is to get a more general idea of the priorities people set for themselves, and to explore the extent to which material possessions may play a role.
15.	<i>Would you say things are important to you? What would happen if your apartment were to catch on fire and you would lose most of your possessions?</i> Learn about the general importance of possessions in the individual's life (Belk, 1988). The aim of this question is to encourage participants to think about their possessions and their importance from a hierarchical perspective, aiming to establish categories and prioritise among them. Even more importantly, as most individuals are not expected to have thought about these questions prior to the interview, the initial reaction is anticipated to inform the overall sentiments held by participants regarding their material possessions.
16.	<i>To what extent has your consumption style changed over time? Could you elaborate on this?</i> Learn about the role of context and whether or not certain key events or experiences may be associated with modifications in consumer styles. For instance, someone may have experienced deprivation during childhood, which may impact their later consumption patterns (Chipp et al., 2011; Grougiou, Moschis, & Kapoutsis, 2015). Similarly, Hamilton's work is relevant here (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006b, 2006a), with her explorations concerning what happens to consumers when their situations in terms of their purchasing power change.

Building on the seminal work of Thompson et al. (1989), interviews employed in the present work were loosely structured with a relatively flexible interview schedule that prompted personal stories and direct experiential accounts as opposed to opinions and abstract generalisations. It is important to note that these questions served as a guideline, with the overall structure left open to enable participants to guide the flow. The interview schedule was created on the basis of prior literature, which then was tested in a few (5) pilot interviews to assess overall clarity and usability of the questions. Although substantial changes were not necessary, minor modifications were implemented to further clarify the questions and to ensure that the terminology was easy to understand, and that the flow made sense.

Given their heavy reliance on communication, interviews should be conducted in a language that is comfortable for both parties (Giorgi, 1985; Creswell, 2013), in the present case in English or in Hungarian, which reflect the comfortable fluency of the researcher. The choice of location for the interview should be one that is mutually convenient to both parties and offers a space where the interviewee feels safe to share his or her experiences in an open fashion. Consequently, interviews took place at the researcher's office, the participant's or the researcher's home, or at an alternative location like a quiet café. For sake of ease and accuracy, interviews were recorded and transcribed. Further elaboration on this latter point will be made in the ethics section below. The length of interviews ranged between 60 and 120 minutes.

3-E.2. Sampling

In interpretive types of research, participants tend to be identified in view of their experience with the focal topic, which also tends to contribute to determining the size and type of the population (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). It is important to bear in mind that in exploratory work the aim is not to achieve a fully representative sample (Götze, Prange, & Uhrovská, 2009). Instead, the notion of theoretical saturation is commonly used as a key determining factor to guide recruitment efforts (Russell & Levy, 2012). Theoretical saturation refers to the particular phase of qualitative research where recruitment is continued until no new insights emerge from the interviews, or in other words when new evidence does not alter emergent interpretations (Gopaldas, 2014; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2014; Horváth & Birgelen, 2015).

Common methods for participant selection include referrals from gatekeepers, opportunities originating from the researcher's own contacts and distal network, and snowballing, where additional members are identified on the basis of participant referrals (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Depending on the focal topic, it may be important to include individuals who possess prior experience with the phenomenon under study, often necessitating purposeful sampling and/or pre-screening (M. A. Smith & Berger, 2010). Hamilton (2009), for instance, guided by her aim to explore the experiences of individuals living in poverty within a heavily consumption dominant and highly unequal society, purposefully selected low income mostly female headed single-parent households, which represented a particularly vulnerable segment of the population. Other scholars with a more generalist purpose may choose to recruit their samples imposing fewer restrictions, and in turn capture a broader cross-section of age, gender and cultural background (Woodruffe, 1997). In line with earlier work emphasising compensatory engagements to be representative of the general public as opposed to specific subgroups of the population (Elliott, 1994; Grunert, 1994; Woodruffe, 1997), no special prerequisites were imposed on the sampling selection in the present study.

The present study builds on interviews with 20 participants, which is in line with general interview research practice that tends to incorporate samples roughly between two and 25 individuals (Creswell, 2013). In the area of compensatory consumption and more broadly consumer research, examples include the work of Woodruffe (1997) and Woodruffe-Burton (1998) with 3, Abdalla and Zambaldi (2016) with 8, Woodruffe-Burton and Wakenshaw (2011) with 10, Myers (1985) with 12, Heath et al. (2011) with 14, Woodruffe-Burton and Elliott (2005) with 27, and finally Hamilton (2009), Hamilton and Catterall (2006a), and Hamilton and Catterall (2006b) with 30 participants. Even more importantly, as mentioned above, it is advantageous to move beyond arbitrary guidelines and numerical goals, and instead use the concept of theoretical saturation as a guiding principle (Russell & Levy, 2012). In the current study, theoretical saturation was achieved at approximately the 15th interview, beyond which point the new interviews did not contribute new ideas or insights.

Two further points should be noted with respect to recruitment and sampling. On the one hand, Eileen Fischer in a recent interview (Figueiredo, Gopaldas, & Fischer, 2017) elaborating upon good practices and guidelines underlying interpretive work highlights the limitations that come from relying on small sample sizes. As illustrated in the following quote: “I think that the trend toward larger, richer databases is here to stay. I think the days of small sample sizes being justified as having reached the point of theoretical saturation are over, because it’s very difficult to know what’s out there that will help you conceptualise the context, the historical, cultural, and social situatedness of your data, if you haven’t done a whole lot more than eight to 10 interviews” (p. 4). These points were particularly embraced in the current research, in order to recognise the evolutionary trends characterising consumer research, and hence the sample size of 20-25 to be chosen to reflect these latter recommendations. The first five interviews were used as a pilot in order to fine-tune the interview protocol and provide the researcher with experience using the phenomenological method. Consequently, these initial interviews were not reflected in the discussion of the findings.

On the other hand, a recent editorial from *Business Ethics Quarterly* suggest that sampling also depends on the actual topic (Reinecke et al., 2016). The following quote summarises the authors’ viewpoints: “There is no single, objective answer as to how many interviews or hours of observation are sufficient. Few in-depth interviews with key respondents may provide focused insights into a particular niche area of research. But broad claims about, for instance, field-level changes may necessitate stronger evidence from more respondents representing multiple perspectives” (p. xviii). Given the specifics of the focal area of inquiry and the relative under-representation of interpretive work in research concerning compensatory and compromisory engagements, the points emphasising the advantages of engaging larger samples were embraced, in turn providing additional guidance for the present work.

Recruitment of participants was pursued via two methods. On the one hand, flyers were distributed in cafes and restaurants inviting people to participate (please see Appendix A for a copy of the flyer). On the other hand, referrals were solicited from the researcher’s social network (friends, family or colleagues) to suggest potential participants willing to be interviewed. After establishing initial contact, further steps (over email or telephone) were made by the researcher to establish a time and place of mutual convenience for a face-to-face meeting. Given the researcher’s network and language skills (i.e. frequent and extensive stays in different countries including France, Portugal and Hungary, and her native proficiency in English and Hungarian), interviews were conducted in three geographic locations: France, Portugal and Hungary. Within the French and Portuguese contexts, only individuals with adequate fluency in English were considered, as interviews were conducted in English. Within the Hungarian context, fewer restrictions were necessary as interviews were conducted either in English or in Hungarian, depending on the participant’s preference. This is in line with other interpretivist work conducted in non-English speaking contexts (van Kempen, 2007; Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016).

3-E.3. Ethical considerations

Given the in-depth nature of phenomenological interviews, it is important to contemplate ethical concerns, and secure informed consent to ensure participants' awareness and understanding of the general purposes of the study, and to confirm confidentiality and anonymity throughout the course of the study (Thompson et al., 1989). Approval from the Ethical Review Board of Durham University Business School has been obtained prior to the onset of the interviews (please see Appendix B for a copy of the approved form). In accordance with the Durham Business School ethical code, a screening criterion to exclude children and elderly people were respected. Furthermore, all participants were treated in line with the ethical guidelines throughout the entire study. The current study did not entail any foreseeable risks to the student's/researcher's health and safety above and beyond what may be expected to incur in everyday life.

Informed consent forms were obtained from each participant prior to the onset of interviews, and after securing commitment to participate (the form can be found in the Appendix C). Participation was voluntary, and individuals were briefed prior to giving their consent to participate in the study, assuring them of full anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews were recorded, and all materials were stored safely. Results were kept entirely confidential and were only used by the researcher and shared with the supervisory team. All potentially identifying information (i.e. references to participants or quotations) were handled using pseudonyms to protect the real identity of the participants, chosen randomly from among common names obtained from publicly available lists within each cultural setting.

3-E.4. Analysis

Following the interview, the researcher needs to advance to the analysis phase and work extensively on the transcribed interview material. Once the coding schedule was finalised incorporating the practical experience and takeaways from the first 5 pilot interviews, all interviews were transcribed personally by the researcher. Although transcribing services are increasingly available to assist scholars in this rather lengthy endeavour, I found it meaningful to do the transcription myself in order to obtain closer exposure to the data. After reading over each of the interviews and creating some initial codes on the margins, NVivo 12 was used for purposes of in-depth interpretation, identifying codes that were in line with the overall exploratory aims of the study. For instance, codes were created to document incidents of compensatory consumption, compromise, compulsive buying, impulsive purchases, conspicuous consumption, retail therapy and self-gifting.

Interviews were transcribed in their entirety, including all input from the interviewer as well as the participants. In addition to words and sentences, longer gaps or utterances were also reflected in the transcripts. This tends to be the most laborious and time-consuming element of the phenomenological interview method, requiring patience and perseverance. Given the holistic nature of this approach, it is

advantageous to read through the entire interview prior to any analysis in order to achieve a global sense, and illuminate a general understanding of how the parts fit together (Giorgi, 1997). Repeated reading facilitates this process, allows for the structure of the interview to unfold, and reveals ways in which the narratives bind certain sections (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This activity is also important for self-verification purposes, as it may expose instances where the interviewer may have been too directive or suggestive, and in turn help to avoid such occurrences in the future. During the early stages, it is useful to take preliminary notes and include descriptive comments throughout the transcript. Upon further elaboration, researchers can move towards more conceptual levels of coding, often involving personal reflection upon their own individual and professional experience.

Taking into account what was learned in the initial descriptive and note-taking phase, the next stage entails the identification and development of emergent themes. Pursuit of themes embraced a multi-level approach. On the first level, the 4 main research questions outlined above were used to provide the general structure of interpretation and analysis. On the second level, emergent themes within each research area were pursued, breaking the whole data into meaningful parts, and selecting quotes and significant statements about the experience (Giorgi, 1997). On the third level, the emphasis shifted to establishing connections across emergent themes; a process that is often referred to by the term *horizontalization*, and underlies the development of the *clusters of meaning* (Moustakas, 1994; J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Guidelines for interpretive analysis emphasise the continuum and sufficient balance between description and interpretation (Kvale, 1983). During the phenomenological interview, the participant's lifeworld is described spontaneously, without any interpretation attempt made by either parties. This is often referred to as an *emic* approach where the intention is to focus on the terms and category systems according to the participant's description of his or her lifeworld, as opposed to others that are based on theoretical explanations or abstractions (Thompson et al., 1989). This is followed by an iterative interpretive stage, capturing instances in which the interviewee discovers new meanings and relations in his or her experiences. Then, the interviewer interprets the meaning based on the interviewee's description, which – if desired – could then be shared with the participant for clarification. Finally, the interviewer begins his or her work on the completed and transcribed interview alone. In terms of technical details and support, data analysis consisted of a combination of manual screening and systematic analysis using the NVivo 12 qualitative software package. As a general practice in analysing interview transcripts, overall trends, patterns and commonalities, as well as differences and discrepancies were explored within each interview, and then across the entire pool of interview data to identify global trends (Nixon & Gabriel, 2016). This process was then completed for the other interview transcripts, searching for patterns that were shared across the different cases (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

As a small reflection regarding the use of NVivo, after having coded approximately half of the interviews, at the time when I first started writing up the results, I identified certain limitations in using

this software. While the coding process was helpful in providing a first approximation to understanding the interviews, they were limited in two ways. On the one hand, experiential accounts often represented examples that could fit into more than one code, which in turn created redundancy and confusion. On the other hand, the richness of the data and the vast information and detail provided by each participant account required a return to the interviews for further reiteration in order to capture additional nuance and finesse beyond the original coding categories. Consequently, while the coding process provided by NVivo was helpful early on in getting an initial understanding of the interviews and emerging trends, subsequent reliance on it was less extensive in comparison to the researcher's original expectations.

During the writing process, researchers proceed from a textural description that includes verbatim examples of *what* the participant experienced, to a structural description that refers to *how* the experience took place. Bringing it all together, the researcher is ultimately charged with the task of composing the core of the phenomenon that provides an understanding of the common themes of the experiences across multiple informants (Creswell, 2013). Further accentuating the circular and cyclical nature of the interview process, Thompson et al. (1989) emphasise that “even at the level of global themes, the researcher should be able to point to specific passages in the transcripts that afford a clear statement of the theme” (p. 142). Establishing an optimal balance between description and interpretation is key during this process. Particular emphasis is placed on theorising, or in other words going beyond the descriptions offered by the participants' experiential accounts to situate the findings within a suitable theoretical framework, and in turn clearly accentuating the theoretical contributions of the study (Reinecke et al., 2016). For the specific purposes of the current work, references and reiterations were made to reflect upon the theoretical framework established during Chapter 2 and presented in detail in Table 2.2 (pp. 25).

There are a few additional points to keep in mind throughout the writing process, including the use of language that is appropriate for one's audience and disciplinary orientation, and a structure and organisation that are clear and reflect a valid representation of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). On the presentation and dissemination end, researchers should include direct and representative quotes that illustrate the primary themes and clusters, textural and structural descriptions, and a synthesis of the experience. As a final task, in addition to summarising what has been learned, it is important to also relate to theory, compare current findings with earlier ones from the extant literature, acknowledge potential limitations, and identify future directions (Creswell, 2013). Ultimately, the reader should walk away from the phenomenological study feeling that he or she understands better what it may be like for someone to experience the given phenomenon under exploration (Polkinghorne, 1989).

3-F. Concluding remarks

The purpose of the current chapter was to situate the present research focusing on compensatory and compromisory consumption in the appropriate methodological stance. I began the chapter by providing a critical review of available scholarly work on compensatory consumption from a methodological perspective, emphasising the heavy domination of experimental approaches. Laboratory studies embedded in a positivist tradition raise a number of concerns, including their narrow focus on the act of consumption while neglecting the rest of the process; their assumption of consumers as rational agents and thus disregarding the role of emotions; their predominant emphasis on dispositional traits at the expense of contextual considerations; and their largely negative conceptualisation of compensatory engagements.

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

Throughout Chapter 2, I emphasised the importance of undertaking a processual view of compensatory consumption, the recognition of affective elements that guide consumer actions above and beyond reason, and the corresponding need to employ methodologies that respect and account for the complex and nuanced lifeworld that individuals inhabit. As is common in phenomenological and qualitatively oriented interpretive studies, scholars elicit personally meaningful stories and individual narratives from respondents to help them understand the enactment of compensation within the specific context experienced by the consumer. These studies emphasise the processual nature of compensatory consumption, which is in marked contrast to the idea that it is a single act or behavioural response as is more common in laboratory research.

Based on the limitations, I concluded that there was a need for greater diversification of methodologies in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption. Using the diagram in Figure 2.2 (pp. 46), I illustrated that different behaviours entail different levels of conscious awareness, rationality and rationalisation; a point which also has important implications for methodology. While quantitative and experimental approaches may work well in exploring transactions and consumption

engagements where the consumer is highly attentive, this may not be the case in other scenarios. Following, I proceeded to offer a systematic comparison between positivist and non-positivist (e.g. constructivist and interpretivist) paradigms and methodological frameworks, explored the basic tenets of interpretive consumer research and the social constructivist framework, and highlighted key advantages underlying their combined application for the present study. Finally, I concluded the chapter by outlining the specific methodological details to be engaged in the present study, including specifics on the interview schedule and their links with theory and prior work; sampling considerations; important ethical guidelines; and a general approach to thematic and reiterative analysis.

Chapters 4 through 6 will embrace these considerations and will discuss the results derived from the current empirical work.

CHAPTER 4.

RESULTS I: PARTICIPANTS AND EMERGING THEMES – PRELIMINARY RESULTS

4-A. Chapter outline

In the previous chapters, I set the stage for studying compensatory consumption by providing an extensive conceptual overview and theoretical framework building on existing literature (Chapter 2), and by highlighting dominant tendencies in current research (Chapter 3). Chapters 2 and 3 enabled the identification of important gaps in the existing literature on compensatory consumption, from a theoretical as well as a methodological standpoint, which in turn provided the identification of conceptual propositions as well as the justification for the methodological orientation pursued in this thesis. The current and the following two chapters will be dedicated to a detailed presentation of the results drawing on all phenomenological interviews, following the overall structure of the four research questions proposed at the end of Chapter 2 (pp. 47).

In this chapter, I present further specifics concerning the participants, along with key observations and emerging themes that will be important to set the stage for the following two results chapters. Then in Chapter 5, I concentrate on the first two research questions exploring how the process of compensatory engagement is experienced within the everyday lives of consumers, and what role context plays in these endeavours. In Chapter 6, I turn to the remaining two research questions and investigate the continuum of compensatory consumption, followed by the role of compromise in the everyday lives of consumers.

Within the auspices of my overall mission to explore compensatory and compromisory consumption in the lifeworld of participants, I also revisit and revise the proposed conceptual frameworks comparing and contrasting compensatory tendencies and compromise from Chapter 2. These include the following models: 1) exploring the compensatory consumption process and continuum (Table 2.3, pp. 38); 2) evaluating the need satisfaction vis-à-vis the compensatory consumption continuum (Figure 2.1, pp. 44), and 3) examining the role of consciousness and rationality in compensatory and compromisory consumption (Figure 2.2, pp. 46).

4-B. Further interview details

4-B.1. Participants

The thesis builds on phenomenological interviews conducted with 20 individuals, recruited from France, Hungary and Portugal. Each interview lasted between 60 to 120 minutes (exact durations can be found in Table 4.1), and the transcribed interviews ranged between 10 to 25 pages of single-spaced text per participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to protect their identity and were chosen randomly from publicly available lists of common names. For sake of simplicity, pseudonyms were selected to match the first letter of the country, such that names beginning with ‘F’ were chosen for participants residing in France; names beginning with ‘H’ for participants residing in

Hungary; and names beginning with ‘P’ for participants residing in Portugal. Table 4.1 provides basic demographic information for each participant, including their experience of living and/or working in different countries; along with their age, gender, highest level of education, field of training and occupation, family status, and certain key details regarding the interview (i.e. date, place and total length).

TABLE 4.1. Basic demographics of the participant pool of 20 consumers recruited from three cultural settings: including France (n=9), Hungary (n=5) and Portugal (n=6).

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: FRANCE (n=9)							
Pseudonym	Experience living in several countries	Age	Gender	Education	Field / occupation	Family status	Date, place & length of interview
Florence	Yes	62	F	University	Education / Coach	Single	5/9/2017 Paris 2 hours
Fay	Yes	48	F	University	Education / Coach	Divorced 2 children	9/25/2018 Paris 1.2 hours
Francesca	Yes	46	F	University	Sales / Entrepreneur	Married 3 children	11/20/2016 Paris 1.3 hours
Fiona	Yes	35	F	University	Media / Reporter	Single	11/23/2016 Paris 2 hours
Flavie	Yes	44	F	University	Sales / Entrepreneur	Married 2 children	12/1/2016 Paris 1.9 hours
Francine	No	24	F	High School	Education / Student	Single	12/2/2016 Paris 1.7 hours
Fanny	Yes	38	F	University	Education / Teacher	Married 2 children	9/19/2018 Rennes 1.5 hours
Fatima	Yes	29	F	University	Education / Intern	Single	4/6/2018 Rennes 1.5 hours
Flora	Yes	40	F	University	Research / Analyst	In relationship	4/25/2017 Paris 2 hours

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: HUNGARY (n=5)							
Pseudonym	Experience living in several countries	Age	Gender	Education	Field / occupation	Family status	Date, place & length of interview
Hannah	No	44	F	University	Office Staff	Married 2 children	9/25/16 Budapest 1.4 hours
Heidi	No	52	F	High school	Education / Staff	Married 2 children	12/8/2016 Budapest 1.3 hours
Helena	Yes	44	F	University	Design / Entrepreneur	Married 2 children	10/11/2018 Budapest 1.5 hours
Hugo	Yes	56	M	University	Education / Teacher	In relationship 3 children	5/21/2018 Budapest 2 hours
Holly	No	42	F	University	Education / Teacher	Married 2 children	10/26/2018 Budapest 1.5 hours
COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: PORTUGAL (n=6)							
Pseudonym	Experience living in several countries	Age	Gender	Education	Field / occupation	Family status	Date, place & length of interview
Paulo	Yes	48	M	University	Education / Teacher	Divorced 2 children	7/4/2017 Lisbon 1.3 hours
Pedro	Yes	46	M	University	Business / Economist	Married 1 child	4/17/2018 Lisbon 1.5 hours
Phoebe	Yes	39	F	University	Stay-home mum	Married 3 children	12/3/2016 Paris 1.8 hours
Petra	Yes	40	F	University	Stay-home mum	Married 2 children	7/20/2017 Lisbon 1.4 hours
Peter	Yes	49	M	University	Sales / Specialist	Divorced 1 child	7/17/2018 Lisbon 1.8 hours
Pamela	Yes	58	F	University	Homemaker	Married 1 child	4/18/2017 Lisbon 1.7 hours

In order to understand each participant's life story more fully, further details about their background and key personal attributes are provided in Table 4.2. The aim of this table is to equip the reader with an enhanced ability to approach the consumer stories and experiential accounts from the individual's perspective, and to help situate each interview more effectively within the lifeworld of participants. Please note that when necessary, certain potentially identifying or sensitive information is

presented in a general fashion in instances where identification may otherwise present a risk to jeopardising anonymity.

Although in this table original consumer testimonials were paraphrased, they were crafted carefully to ensure consistency with the content and style that permeated throughout the interviews. In the case of particular expressions that carried special meaning, quotation marks were used to reflect the individual consumer's voice. As mentioned in Chapter 3, theoretical saturation was achieved at approximately the 15th interview, beyond which point the additional interviews did not contribute new insights. The first five pilot interviews were not used in the final analysis, given their fundamental role in helping to fine-tune the interview protocol, and provide the researcher with experience using the phenomenological method.

TABLE 4.2. Additional information pertaining to each participant case.

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: FRANCE (n=9)	
Florence	Is American, has been living in Paris for the past 20 years, and considers herself local. She is self-employed. Although she owns her apartment, she often struggles with financial difficulties, especially given the increasing limitations and decreasing demand in her line of work. She enjoys socialising with others and spends a lot of time at social functions. She belongs to an expat organisation with periodic reunions that she likes to attend in order to catch up with friends and to "recharge her batteries". She has to control her expenses given her financial situation, although indicates greater leniency in shopping when traveling. She likes shopping in general but reports to shop alone when buying things for herself, as she doesn't like to "waste others' time". She likes helping others with their shopping and appreciates the social aspect. She would like to make some changes in her life, be more responsible, manage her savings better, live in a tidier environment, but overall is content with herself. She thinks "it's OK to be naughty sometimes and let go", you can't always be responsible.
Fay	Is from a Central Asian republic, previously married to a French-American, and is now divorced sharing custody over two children. She is an entrepreneur and has recently established her own business in the area of personal training and development, after having worked for different organisations within the same industry. Following her deep interest in coaching, she talks about substantial changes in her consumption style and feels to be presently in a "more balanced state of wellbeing". She reports to have found alternative outlets to make her feel good, no longer necessitating material goods and "retail therapy type of shopping" that used to be characteristic of her in her past. Now she embraces movements associated with de-cluttering and almost anti-consumerism, taking pride in having fewer but relevant things.
Francesca	Is from Israel and has been living in Paris for 3 years following her husband's career along with their 3 children. Her career prior to their relocation was in pharmaceuticals, and she voiced difficulties with having to leave her job as a result of the move. Beyond her inability to have an income, she missed contributing to society in other ways. She has mentioned some possibilities in the pipeline as a future option for her to re-enter the workforce. She generally enjoys being in Paris and views it as an interesting opportunity to experience different fashion and consumption styles. She finds the cultural differences between Israel and France particularly intriguing and is fascinated by the small boutiques rather than the large multinational brands that are dispersed in Paris in all neighbourhoods. She watches Parisian women to learn and adopt some changes to her own preferences. She is trying to "find her place", would like to change her style and appearance to fit in with her surroundings. She wants to leave her "sporty and army-like demeanour" and aspires to be more feminine, more elegant, and more fashionable.

Fiona	Is French but travels a lot for her work as she is a journalist covering major sports events all around the world. She is single, enjoys writing and working in cafes, and has an infatuation with certain material items. For instance, she described an experience making purchases – like shoes – which she knew she would not be able to use, but nonetheless could not leave behind as “it was just calling her”. When describing herself, she acknowledges that her apartment is quite messy, but it doesn't seem to bother her, and she manages to cope with it well and find whatever she needs. She presents an interesting balance between impulsive and irrational tendencies that are easily voiced yet do not seem to intrude everyday life, kept in control.
Flavia	Is American and moved to Paris 3 years ago to follow her husband's job transition. Due to the language barrier, she was unable to secure concrete employment, but tried to nonetheless remain active with conducting interviews and writing about interesting events, people or exhibitions for magazines targeting expatriates. As this engagement was voluntary and hence unpaid, Flavia voices concerns about not having an income, particularly as her consumption preferences tend to be geared towards more exclusive and higher priced products. Despite her limitations, she will not make substantial adjustments to her own style, and rather purchases fewer items to keep up with her favourite brands. She repeatedly emphasises that she still can maintain her own style, despite her lack of income. Family holidays are frequently tied to consumption for her, and she tends to give herself greater flexibility to consume while traveling.
Francine	Is a French student pursuing Asian studies, and is infatuated with learning about Asian cultures and languages. She is from Nice but came to Paris for her studies, and currently lives in a district that is popular in the Asian community, which she appreciates as it gives her more exposure to meet people and participate in relevant cultural events and exhibitions. She plans on staying in Paris upon completing her studies given that the greater amplitude of job opportunities. She is quite organised, but at the same time lazy, which she would like to change as it makes her anxious. She lacks a bit of confidence in her shopping and has a tendency to buy multiple items in the same product category (i.e. different colours) when she likes something. She also relies highly on her friends for advice, and she is a social shopper. She has low consumer confidence, often relies on others' opinions and – as mentioned above – buys the same item in multiple colours to maximise the benefit.
Fanny	Is originally from Turkey and has recently relocated to France with her family (husband and 2 children) in response to the increasing difficulties regarding the political and economic situation in her home country. This is the first time she has lived outside her home country, which raises some concerns for her given that her whole family had to follow her job, despite the collective nature of the decision. She has settled down well and envisions France as her future home. She enjoys her work and it provides sufficient means to support the family. She has some relatives from Turkey who settled down in different parts of France. Regarding her consumption patterns, she mostly shops online as has no interest or patience to go to brick and mortar stores; finds them “overwhelming and stressful”. She tends to shop by category depending on need; except for makeup, which – as she states – she can buy any time.
Fatima	Is from an Eastern European country and has been living in France for the past 2 years pursuing a master's degree. Prior to moving to France, she lived in other Eastern European countries for educational purposes. Upon completing her studies, she would like to remain in France, although feels that the language presents a rather significant obstacle. She is single and lives in modest means because of her restrictive student budget. Regardless, she indicates certain recent changes in her consumption style, shifting her preferences towards “more enduring or healthier / organic options”, despite the elevated costs. She socialises regularly with her international student peers and views these engagements as a reward for her otherwise somewhat restrictive and cautious daily existence. Combines rational planning with impulsive elements tied to mood and external context, like weather.
Flora	Is from a Middle-Eastern society but has lived in numerous European countries most of her life with her parents and then alone. She has been living in Paris for over 10 years. She is an accomplished professional, although following the decision to leave her job a few years ago she has been experiencing difficulty finding a job that would provide the right challenge and fit. She has recently engaged herself in further study and is constantly looking for a new professional challenge in Paris or in nearby European countries. She is quite social and participates in different expat organisations. She does not intend to have children. She likes more exclusive and higher priced items; a characteristic she appears reluctant to admit given the potentially negative societal connotation while not having concrete employment and income. She has some degree of financial security given some investments, but nonetheless feels guilty when making larger purchases. Her mother seems to have a particularly strong

influence on her fashion style, despite the numerous differences she mentions between their personalities. Her childhood upbringing was quite strict and rigorous, focusing a lot on her studies and educational performance.

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: HUNGARY (n=5)

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| Hannah | Is Hungarian, lives in the capital and works as an office staff for a large organisation. Her husband is in the IT sector, and they generally do not experience financial strain. She considers herself an open and helpful person, and the one that many colleagues turn to when needing a solution. She tends to care quite a lot about what people think of her, which she views at times as a large burden. She is quite a considerate consumer, but she is more lenient when it comes to her kids, where she exhibits more impulsive tendencies. She comes from modest means and she would like to loosen up a bit in terms of her current lifestyle. They are more comfortable and could afford a bit more, which she uses as a justification for wanting to change. She has concerns regarding some behaviours that seems compulsive at times due to social pressures, like excessive drinking, and she is hoping to work on that, she would like to be more in control. |
| Heidi | Is Hungarian and has lived there her whole life. Her husband is in the banking sector and they live quite comfortably in the outskirts of the capital. She dresses in a quite extravagant fashion, and she is aware that people around her don't share her taste in clothing. She likes buying gifts for others, and making others happy, and tends to give others a lot of compliments. She is struggling a bit with her own appearance as since she had children, she stopped working out and thus carries excess weight. She is comfortable with her current life and surroundings, especially compared to her modest means growing up. She feels the traditional gender roles are quite prevalent in her life and is trying to break away from them. She appreciates teaching as she learns a lot about the new generation and their needs and perspectives. |
| Helena | Is Hungarian and lives with her family in the outskirts of the capital city. She has some experience living abroad, but not for extensive periods. She used to work in banking prior to having children, and since then has been managing different entrepreneurial initiatives. She and her family enjoy traveling and share several hobbies. In terms of her consumption, she identified a change over time in her general style and approach to material goods and possessions, which she attributes to age and relative affluence. She doesn't like the concept of ownership, which makes her feel uncomfortable. She is a rather sporadic consumer, but still enjoys having nice things, cares about her appearance, and also about others' opinion. |
| Hugo | Is American and has been living in Hungary with his family for over 10 years. Has been divorced for many years, sharing custody over their 3 children. He is in the education sector, is relatively happy with his job and is not thinking about changing. He doesn't care much about material possessions and can go for a long time without buying anything. This can go on until he experiences an urge to buy and spend – a notion he refers to as 'spending pressure', at which time he finds an excuse to go shopping. He enjoys shopping mostly with his daughter, and in his description of these encounters he reflects upon the social aspects and their general tendency to talk, have lunch, and spend time together. He enjoys the process of shopping, not so much the ownership or possession. |
| Holly | Is Hungarian and has lived in the capital city her whole life. She used to work as a school teacher in the past, but then found it difficult to manage balancing family and work obligations and thus decided to focus on her children during their younger years. She enjoys socialising with friends and family, and she travels a lot with her husband and close friends in their social circle. She has relatively little confidence in general as well as in her consumption. She turns to special types of consumption, like buying things in second hand stores, where she is more willing to experiment with unusual and atypical purchases. |

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: PORTUGAL (n=6)

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| Paulo | Is Portuguese by origin but spent extensive amounts of time abroad, mostly in the UK. He moved back to Portugal permanently a few years ago for family reasons, although continues to be reluctant to accept the subsequent changes in status and general opportunities and options given the nature of the Portuguese environment and market conditions. He often feels depressed and discouraged and tends to have a preference towards items that reflect status. He would like to see himself more disciplined, doing exercise on a regular basis, and committing to his work that in turn brings him recognition. |
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- Pedro** Is Portuguese by origin but has spent the majority of his adult life abroad in many countries. Most of his professional career has been in banking. He is a very accomplished individual. He enjoys social activities, although appears somewhat introvert and prefers when others take the lead in organising these. His job is highly stressful, for which he compensates by spending all his free time with his family. He enjoys traveling and discovering new cultures. He describes himself as a highly rational consumer, but in his stories interesting hedonic patterns surface in relation to certain more experiential domains, including traveling and consumption related to food, wine or socialising. He despises shopping for clothing and would prefer if someone could do all his shopping for him. He enjoys the process of planning for holidays and purchasing wine.
- Phoebe** Is of Eastern European origin but has lived in multiple countries following her husband's expatriate employment. She has been living in Portugal for 2 years but is likely to move on in a year or two given her husband's job-related obligations. She has a college level education and several follow-up degrees and certificates, but given the frequent moves and exposure to cultures and language barriers, has been unable to secure employment. Given the particular division of roles within her family unit, she tends to be the primary caregiver for their children. She is quite social and finds international communities in each new culture. She identified with her original Hungarian roots and tends to relate best to others who share her cultural origin. She has very close family ties and spends a lot of time with her parents. Her children play an integral part in her shopping activities, often serving as a trigger for her to initiate shopping engagements. She spends on material items for herself and for their home, but justifies by commenting that they do not tend to be large purchases and she does not pursue high-priced brands.
- Petra** Is Swiss by origin but has been living in Portugal for over 10 years. She has a background in hospitality but has left her job when she and her husband decided to move and was unable to find employment since. She would ideally like to work, now that her children are older, and has explored several options, but finds it challenging given her years outside of the workforce. Her husband spends extensive amounts of time away from the family, leaving her to take care of the children on a daily basis. She enjoys shopping and thinks of herself as a somewhat impulsive or even compulsive shopper. She participates in online forums where she regularly sells her children's clothes that they no longer use, and then she feels more at ease to replace them by buying new things. She buys a lot of things for her children and for their home. She enjoys socialising with other international members of her community. Although she likes living in Portugal, she identifies several challenges and nuisances associated with the substantial cultural differences.
- Peter** Is Portuguese – American by origin but has been living and working in many countries throughout his life. He is divorced, and shares custody of his son. He is a very dedicated father, and is deeply involved in his son's upbringing, particularly given that his ex-wife holds a high-profile and demanding position. He would prefer to live in Portugal full time but given the lack of opportunities and his ex-wife's career aspirations, he needs to spend a lot of time away. He is an only child and feels obliged to take care of his aging parents who live in Portugal. He enjoys spending time with his friends, but as most are international and live in different countries, this is not possible on a regular basis. He experiences this as a great disappointment, and he is envious when he sees an ad portraying a group of happy friends sharing their time together. He describes himself as risk-averse, which is reflected in his shopping style. His consumption tends to be domain specific. For electronics and other durables, he conducts extensive research and evaluates his choices carefully, motivated by rational considerations to find the best value while meeting key requirements. He is a reluctant shopper, in need of confirmation and advice from others he trusts. He is comfortable enough with his accomplishments, but sometimes finds it hard to justify some of his early decisions, especially as he perceives his social circle as more accomplished. He is quite a planner, and generally is content with what he has. Even if he won the lottery, he would not move from his house or consume excessively, he would prefer to use his money to help out his friends and family.
- Pamela** Is of Ukrainian origin but has spent most of her adult life abroad to pursue her studies and subsequently work-related missions. Currently, she works for a start-up and has been quite successful in advancing within the firm. She is in a committed relationship with an older person, and they are planning on getting married in the near future. She cares about her appearance and has a few favourite stores where she prefers to shop. She spends a long time contemplating her decision before making a purchase, solicits advice and input from her friends and family and has quite low purchase confidence. She appreciates the novelty of new acquisitions and considers going out and appearing in the same outfit in social media posts frustrating. She would like to be able to have a car and also have a position where she is able to dress up in high-end professional attire.

Some important observations can be made regarding the group of participants. First, they include individuals who are quite advantaged as opposed to being disadvantaged, as evidenced by their relatively high levels of education and employment status (either their own or that of their spouse). This is important in that it may have important ramifications regarding their consumption. Nonetheless, research shows that ‘studying up’ and ‘studying down’, or in other words capturing audiences that are affluent along with others who are disadvantaged, enables a more complete understanding of a given phenomenon, and hence should be pursued more in contemporary research (Nader, 1972). Second, participants in the current study tend to capture slightly older age groups in early to mid- or late adulthood. This represents a useful departure from several earlier studies that focus heavily on college students (Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Soo, et al., 2015) highlighting an alternative demographics. However, this may in turn limit the transferability of the findings to a more general population, as is also the case for studies focusing on college students (Park & Lessig, 1977). Finally, there is a wide range of nationalities and residences represented in the present research. Although this may raise concerns in a study with a more positivistic orientation where the aim is to achieve generalisation to a wider population, this is not an issue for the present work given its in-depth and comprehensive approach that focuses on the prevalence of compensatory engagements within general consumption patterns (Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Moisio, 2007; Abdalla & Zambaldi, 2016). Nonetheless, the greater contextual framing will be taken into account during the detailed analytical stage, particularly when reflecting upon the impact of context.

4-B.2. The interview experience

In general, participants seemed to enjoy talking about their consumer experiences, although it also became clear that most of them did not regularly think about their own consumption. In fact, during the interviews, many needed some time to think of and retrieve specific examples of consumer experiences when questioned. After some contemplation, most were able to recall and elaborate on certain notable moments. There were several comments throughout the interviews that emphasised participants’ excitement about the discussions, such as:

“Wow, this is so cool! [...] Such a good question” (Flora)

“This is actually very interesting to talk about, many times these things are so automatic, and you don’t even think about them. And you don’t pay attention, they are more like habits.” (Phoebe).

These excerpts demonstrate that participants enjoyed their engagement in the interview experience and found thinking about these topics stimulating and informative. This is in line with recent work that recognises the impact of participation in qualitative research. In particular, exposure to qualitative research experiences have been shown to increase participants’ reflexivity and self-awareness about the particular topic (Cassell, Radcliffe, & Malik, 2017).

In order to understand personal experiences related to general as well as compensatory consumption, it is important to highlight certain particularities concerning the interviews. For instance, I would like to draw attention to how consumers approached the interview experience at first, and how their perception evolved over time. As apparent from the interview protocol (please see Table 3.1, pp. 66), questions posed to participants were rather general, prompting them to share a positive or negative shopping experience or to talk about something desired with a future orientation. My initial reasoning to incorporate general rather than specific questions was to enable interviewees to become the main ‘drivers’ and guides for the conversation, in line with the phenomenological approach and interpretive consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Following further contemplation, I identified certain additional benefits that are worthy of mention.

Many participants commented that when thinking about the interview, they were expecting direct and straight forward questions to which they would provide clear and simple answers; similar to the expectations of a survey-based method. This assumption may be explained by the participants’ general lack of prior experience in academic style and interpretivist interviewing. Consequently, several people admitted that they were quite surprised when they realised the extent of involvement and detailed elaboration that was expected concerning their own personal experience. Some of them paused from time to time during a story to confirm that what they were saying was OK and was in fact what I – the researcher – had in mind with the question.

As a particularly interesting observation, the participant-driven nature of the interviews facilitated a switch between two consumer roles. More specifically, after the early phases of the interview, participants were able to let their guard down and at least occasionally relinquish the role of a purely rational consumer who is expected to fit with individual or societal ideals. Instead, participants talked freely about their life experiences and became the ‘storyteller’. Within these stories, it seemed more ‘acceptable’ for the protagonist (i.e. the consumer) to reveal experiences that were impulsive or may have defied pure rationality. Consequently, the stories unfolded in a way that yielded a rich set of highly insightful and honest experiential accounts.

In terms of content, consumer stories rarely focused on the simple consumption act in isolation, but rather incorporated the context, thoughts, feelings, and emotional states. Even those concrete experiential accounts that started out as relatively simple engagements tended to evolve further and became more complex over time. Participants seemed to appreciate making sense of their own consumption and seemed open to explore and share revelations of themselves as ‘consumers’. These encompassed a wide spectrum of personal and contextual elements, including insecurities, childhood memories, moods, frustrations, important events, and a range of social considerations; which will be explored further in the following sections.

As another interesting contradiction, initially the majority of people noted that they did not really consume much on a regular basis, with many identifying themselves to be ‘rational consumers purchasing based on need’. These sentiments often raised doubt in several individuals concerning the

value of their participation in this study and questioned whether they may be the right person to be interviewed or have anything relevant to share regarding consumption. Interestingly, once the interviews proceeded and prompted participants to elaborate on specific experiences, it became clear that the vast majority of individuals could account for compensatory tendencies quite easily in their regular consumer engagements and were also quite ready to discuss them when stimulated. Along these lines, many of the self-acclaimed non-regular consumers (e.g. Pedro and Peter) ended up providing quite detailed and lengthy experiential accounts of compensatory consumption.

These observations reveal several interesting points. First, most consumers do not contemplate their consumption extensively, and when asked to reflect upon their behaviours on a more conscious level, they seem to revert to general assumptions and quick approximations. When engaging in stories, however, and hence shifting the focus from largely conscious processes to others that involve unconscious elements, the picture consumers project about themselves becomes richer and more colourful. Second, making sense of consumption tends to be an iterative process for individuals; one that evolves as it is being negotiated between – or in a sense co-created by – the participant and the interviewer. This point will be explored more fully in Chapter 7. Finally, contradicting earlier propositions that restrict compensatory consumption engagements to certain groups, the regularity with which participants were able to identify compensatory instances in their own lives signals that this phenomenon may be representative of the general population (Elliott, 1994; Grunert, 1994).

The remaining section of this chapter will be dedicated to identifying preliminary results that provide important guidance for the presentation and discussion of the research questions in subsequent chapters.

4-C. Preliminary results

In order to capture the essence of the consumer stories and to explore the meaning of consumption for individuals, participants were asked to think of and reflect upon general as well as specific consumption engagements in as much detail as possible. As part of their discussions concerning the consumption process, interviewees frequently referred to thoughts, emotions and / or contextual factors that permeated their experience and in turn played a role in their consumption, resulting in a rich collection of consumer stories. These deep reflections were important as they enabled an understanding of consumer experiences as they occurred within their lifeworld.

Before turning to a detailed assessment of the interviews and addressing the research questions raised in this thesis, it is important to highlight some observations that emerged based on multiple reiterations of the interviews, yielding important ramifications in terms of the structure and presentation of the findings. The first one concerns the role of conscious / more rational versus unconscious / less rational thinking in the identification of everyday compensatory encounters, while the second highlights certain consumer behavioural patterns that resulted in the emergence of distinct consumer profiles.

4-C.1. Compensatory consumption in everyday life

As a starting point to explore compensatory consumption encounters in everyday life, it is meaningful to present a few particularities that became apparent early on during the interview process. Interestingly, ‘compensation’ was most frequently interpreted within a monetary context in reference to salaries and other employment benefits. This highlights that the term ‘compensatory consumption’ is a theoretical term that is used in consumer research but is not a term that is used in the same way in everyday life.

Following clarification, when asked directly about compensatory experiences, participants stated that they did not engage in such compensation in their own practice. Yet once they were prompted to elaborate upon specific consumption stories from their own life, they quite openly shared instances where their behaviours were unmistakably compensatory in nature. The examples in Table 4.3 illustrate this dichotomy, showcasing consumer reflections early on in the interview that emphasise rationality, followed by subsequent reflections that highlight instances of compensatory consumption as they emerge through the participants’ experiential accounts. This points to a notable discrepancy between what consumers admit to doing when consciously thinking about their behaviour as opposed to what actually permeates through their consumer stories as they live and experience them.

TABLE 4.3. Illustrations of rational and compensatory consumer engagements.

Participant	Consumer reflections and stories (rational vs. compensatory)
Peter	“I consider myself... I only buy things if I need it. So I guess I would be a frugal consumer. I mean food, I will buy whatever, I always try to buy organic, there I try to spend more money no problem. But otherwise I must say that for spending, I’m not much of an impulse buyer. That’s probably kind of how I buy things, consumer things”. (Rational) “I don't have the fast car, you know, I don't buy a fast car. Like in the movies that oh, you are compensating for something. I don't, no, I mean I probably do compensate somewhere, I'm sure I am because I am insecure in some ways, but I don't know how I... I don't... I can't really think of anything... [...] When buying an iPad... So I was planning on buying an iPad after I finished my course. You know, successfully passed all the exams. I suppose it comes down to, and that was, if something I guess, maybe it was my, all of my friends have one, and this one is something that they had and I could afford.” (Compensatory; conspicuous)
Francesca	“I buy things when I need them. Usually even if there are, you know, sales of buy two get the third one free, I tend to buy what I need. Not large scale. I don’t know if I need it tomorrow”. (Rational) “Do I compensate? Yes. Nowadays some chocolate. But this is very bad. Because, you know, I am just thinking about.... Just yesterday night, I said to myself, wow, you are eating, I’m not eating good, I am not taking care of myself enough in terms of eating healthy. I know that I am eating too much carbs than what I should. Usual, huh? Especially in winter. [...] And in other cases.... I guess shopping generally is a compensation. [...] I can buy something... It can be also if I know it will make me feel good. It can be also the opposite. So for example yesterday I heard about this job that I got, so I bought myself some small treat, some chocolate or something. But it wasn’t something big.” (Compensatory; retail therapy)

Phoebe	"I buy things based on what I need." (Rational) "For instance, I tend to dress differently if I know that I am meeting people for whom it is important... In the US the contrast was so big, you know, you barely even get out of your car, you go to the store, to the gym, but at the same time, that little bubble for example in the town where I lived, it was a really rich environment. And most of the parents were really super rich, celebrities, doctors, really a lot of wealth. And they of course dressed the part, they had Gucci and I don't know what else. And it happened that we would organise every other week some dinner with the other parents, mostly the moms, like Desperate Housewives. But that was really a time when everyone dressed up, and I also felt like yeah, of course, I have to dress up, I have to look good. These events you couldn't just show up in a T-shirt." (Compensatory; conspicuous consumption)
Pedro	"I buy things mostly for what I get out of them. For the use that I do. Like a car for driving, well, and for the pleasure that I get out of it. Not purely utilitarian in the sense of going from A to B. But for the pleasure I get out of it. You know, like drinking wine. The purpose is not to get drunk, but to drink something that you like." (Rational) "Oh man. After we finished another trip. Kind of, you know, getting back to work is always tough, and kind of planning another trip and seeing another trip at the end of the tunnel kind of makes the process easier. That was it. So I just get back from holidays, start thinking where we'll go next, check some options." (Compensatory; escape)
Pamela	"I rarely buy things when I just feel like it. So I go when I really need something." (Rational) "I go shopping, last year I started going shopping more. I started buying small things maybe, once a month. Because I, my lifestyle changed a bit, I live alone, I have more time, so shopping became, I don't know, maybe it's changing in my life a bit. Maybe I am not understanding it actually, maybe it's bringing me more joy perhaps. I started going there, it seems to be a more fun thing than it used to be. Because I have more time, I am more calm, I have things to look at, and see what's happening in the world, what fashion is there. So in a ways it's a complemented something that was gone from my life. Well, I became single, and there was a gap. So in a way with shopping." (Compensatory; passing time and gratification)
Fanny	"I shop on a need basis. For example three weeks ago, my jeans were, they were ripped. Torn. Yes, they were torn. I had to get rid of my jeans, and I bought new ones. Need basis." (Rational) "So when I really wanted something? There was a new concealer, it was all the hype, it was only available in the States. So I asked my father to call his friend, to have his address, a 60 year-old man, and have my concealer shipped to him. He is in Los Angeles. You know, because he comes here all the time, to Turkey. All the time. So I had the concealer shipped to his office, so and they were at a conference, and they were off that week, so the package went to his home instead. And the wife of the man found the box, and she thought he was cheating on him. And so she threw it away. And then my father asked me about it, and they reordered it, it was a second time around he received the package. It took us 3 months to get it. But instead of waiting for someone to go to the States and come back, I got obsessed, and I had to have it now." (Compensatory; compulsive consumption)

Fatima	“I don’t really like shopping. I mean, because, well my parents are divorced, so I grew up partly with my grandparents; in East it’s common, you grow up with your family. So I grew up with my grandparents and partly with my mother who is a teacher as well, and so we never actually had a lot of money. And the thing is like, if you have something to wear, something to eat, and somewhere to sleep, you’re OK. So I grew up the same time watching Cartoon Network, and there was this publicity of these things which we never saw, never had them. So it was always... But it was something distant for me.” (Rational) “When a few weeks ago, we had some sun outside, and it was hot, and there was on my list that I need shoes when it will be hotter, and I was like OK, this is the moment when I go to buy my shoes. Because I am very near the office, so I take the bus, so I really don't... I have such a routine that is awful, so to go take the metro and go to the centre, it's an effort. And on this day it was already raining, but I was like no, I will go to the store where I saw the shoes two months ago. [...] Yes, and that day I think it was because, yeah, so I was not feeling that good, and I just received some money on my account, and I was like OK, I will get the shoes, which I still didn't wear. I scratched them from the list, and now I'm ready for some sun.” (Compensatory; retail therapy)
Flavia	“When we moved to Paris, we knew we were going to get a furnished apartment, and we knew that whatever wasn't in the apartment that's what IKEA would be for. And it was. You know, we brought casual clothes, and my husband actually did a major shopping before he came here for work stuff, for shirts and pants and stuff, because he knew he could do a lot better in the States than here. For the kids we stocked up on clothes.” (Rational) “I am a shopaholic. I really love to shop. And I like to go shop for, I really like nice stuff. I don't like to buy garbagy stuff. If I'm gonna buy, I'm gonna buy really good stuff. Otherwise I just won't buy it. [...] I just love shoes. I love them all. In their own unique special ways, they are seasonal stuff, or day to day. I love them all. Jackets, all that stuff, Burberry scarf, those are kinds of things that I know I would just want, because those are classics. And no matter when and how, they will always be in style.” (Compensatory; conspicuous consumption)
Flora	“I only shop when I need something. Which isn't often. It is true. I don't find it very enjoyable. No, because I only shop when I actually, usually when I need something, which is almost never. But no. Because we don't really need.” (Rational) “I can be considered a shopaholic. [...] Why do I decide to buy things? Personally, most of the time it's spontaneous. That's me, personally. I almost never need anything. You know, I always have what I need for different occasions. I always have something to wear, the right outfit. I am quite fortunate that way, I have more than enough stuff in my closet. I usually have far too many shoes, if I'm really honest, and I don't have, I have a lot of dresses. I have this obsession with dresses, I love dresses far more than trousers. They are more elegant. [...] I'm very spontaneous shopper. It doesn't happen often, but I suddenly, I go like 6 months I don't buy anything, and suddenly when I shop I just buy. You know, I walk past something, and I fall in love with a dress, and I just go in, and it's quick. But only if it's really nice. (Compensatory; impulse buying)
Florence	“There are moments when I plan ahead, when I know I need certain things that I don't buy in France, and then I go buy them in the States. Like underwear and things, and some of my basic clothing, I always buy in the States. Because of size, because I am a bigger size than a lot of stores sell in France, so I always plan ahead for certain purchases.” (Rational) “Do I compensate... I figure out areas of life to compensate. Wine shopping, for example. When I go to the wine salon. Every year I say OK, I’m gonna spend this much, and I spend almost double. So when I say I’m gonna spend 300, I spend 600. And when I say I’m gonna spend 200, I spend 4 or 500. And then I just justify it.” (Compensatory; impulse buying)

Hannah	“Well, I don’t buy on impulse, I am more rational, it doesn't happen very often. I usually look at something in the window for months, and then when I finally would decide that I would buy it, it is hopefully, or most often gone already. Which is not necessarily a bad thing. But overall I am more of a considerate buying.” “I definitely compensate sometimes. With an extravagant purchase, like a cake or a bar of chocolate, or a large supreme Starbucks latte. This is the typical female reaction to something. If something bad happens, or something tense, then a self-rewarding reflex, like 'screw you, I am still going to feel good, and I'm going to do what is not allowed. Because normally of course someone doesn't eat or drink these kinds of things on a daily basis. And I tend to do the same thing as well. When I really am tense, and really nervous, and I can find the time, I do the same thing. This is not something that I do on a regular basis. It could be as a result of a work conflict, then I like, there what happens is, what is another extra for me is that it allows me to break away from that environment, to be somewhere else, in a place that I like, to reward myself. And this could happen based on a work or a family conflict. Obviously not every time, as it would be quite strenuous from a variety of reasons, but I think this is a really female thing. I think women do this a lot. And I definitely recognise myself. (Compensatory; retail therapy)
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The quotes in Table 4.3 suggest that compensatory engagements are quite common in consumers’ daily lives and seem to emerge in connection to a wide range of product and service categories, including food and drinks, clothing, accessories, household items, or vacation planning. It is also important to recognise that the act of consumption can be experienced as fun for some people, while a burden for others. Furthermore, different consumers find pleasure and gratification in different material possessions, with variations not only across but also within consumers, highlighting the importance of domains. Many consumers also exhibit cyclical behaviours in their consumption that fluctuate between rational and compensatory compartments. Finally, the evolution of consumer preferences for the same individual can reveal interesting patterns, once we take into account, for instance, the passing of time, the change of seasons, or a particularly meaningful life-changing event.

These points are important in understanding the prevalence and meaning of compensatory engagements from the consumer perspective and will be illustrated by concrete examples and discussed further in subsequent chapters. They also carry important implications that can inform the methodological design of compensatory consumption research, which will be revisited in the discussion section in Chapter 7.

4-C.2. The emergence of consumer clusters

The previous section demonstrated that compensatory engagements are rather common and can be identified easily within the everyday lives of consumers. Based on multiple reiterations of the interview data, it also became evident that the impact of the underlying needs and motivations driving compensatory endeavours do not emerge in isolation, but instead seem to operate in combination with other motivations and are often initiated by the presence of triggers.

During the exploratory process focusing on how compensatory engagements were experienced by participants within their lifeworld, and upon in-depth contemplations regarding the process, context and

continuum, I realised that forcing individuals into a pre-defined behavioural category would be overly simplistic in that such an approach would overlook the richness that permeated the consumer stories. To put it differently, when considering the full spectrum ranging from pre- to post-acquisition periods in compensatory consumption experiences, it seemed presumptuous to talk about one single compensatory consumer type. Instead, a more fitting approach seemed to be one that explored the extent to which different compensatory engagements were representative of different emerging consumer groups. Within this vein and following further re-iterative reflections, four relatively distinct consumer clusters emerged on the basis of certain key shared characteristics and compensatory and compromisory behavioural patterns.

It is important to note that this approach represents a slight departure from my earlier plans. Based on the synthesis of existing literature presented in Table 2.3 (pp. 38), I anticipated that most consumers would classify to fit into one of the behavioural categories established under the umbrella of compensatory consumption. While this may be a possible direction in some cases, it appears limited in capturing the full complexity pertaining to all consumers, particularly when taking into account the role of context. On the most fundamental level, certain key characteristics emerged that distinguished the four consumer clusters, including: 1) the extent of congruence between participants' actual and ideal self-states; 2) the degree of acceptance of their own consumer identities; and 3) the motivations driving compensatory engagements. These factors were relevant given their influence throughout the different stages within the compensatory process. Importantly, they seemed to be manifested differently in the case of the four different consumer clusters, as will be discussed in great detail in the next chapters.

On one end of the continuum of consumer clusters, the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal self – as perceived by participants – was so great that material goods and consumer experiences were no longer able to rectify the perceived gap. These consumers exhibited a variety of addictive habits and practices and seemed to endure recurrent frustrations that led to frequent compensatory cycles and relapses. They wanted to change themselves in substantial and fundamental ways, and hence revealed little acceptance of their actual selves. Their motivations to consume concentrated on their attempt to approximate their ideal self-states, engaging in behaviours that were frequently followed by regret and remorse. Importantly, the majority of consumption activities in this group were compensatory in nature.

On the other end of the continuum, ideal selves were much closer to the perceived actual selves, enabling participants to experience consumption in a qualitatively different fashion. These consumers seemed highly content with most aspects of their lives. Although they recognised some shortcomings, they were not too concerned about them, demonstrating high levels of self-acceptance. Their motivations to consume were predominantly need-based, and their compensatory comportments were largely opportunistic and were driven by the external context. As emphasised during the more detailed presentation and discussion of the results in the following two chapters, these fundamental differences held far-reaching implications for the entire compensatory process, including the antecedents, motivations, behaviours and post-consumption consequences.

Building on these factors that contributed to the emergence of different consumer profiles, descriptive labels were identified to summarise and capture the essence of different groups. Consequently, the following four consumer clusters or types were identified: 1) unhappy idealists; 2) aspirational non-conformists; 3) mental modelists; and 4) happy experientialists. As mentioned above, as we move from the first group towards the fourth one, the discrepancy between participants' actual and ideal selves decreases, in turn enabling higher degrees of self-acceptance. In addition, motivations gradually shift from ideal-self attainment towards need fulfilment targeted by the product or the experience, with the context playing an increasingly important role.

The following two chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) will be organised to further elaborate upon these four clusters, highlighting particular characteristics and consumer tendencies that qualitatively differentiate among members of the different groups. As mentioned above, Chapter 5 will concentrate on the different stages of the compensatory consumption process and the role of context, providing extensive support derived from the interviews and consumer stories. Following this, in Chapter 6 I discuss the compensatory consumption continuum, and examine the prevalence of consumer compromise. Particular attention will be devoted to exploring need satisfaction and the role of consciousness and rationality in compensatory as opposed to compromisory consumption engagements across the four consumer types.

CHAPTER 5.

RESULTS II: COMPENSATORY CONSUMPTION AS A PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

5-A. Chapter outline

Chapter 4 provided a review of the preliminary results and key observations that were important to set the stage for more extensive analyses and discuss the findings. Building on this, this chapter will address the first two research questions pursued in the present thesis, focusing on the process and the role of context in compensatory consumption. First, incorporating the interplay between the extent of identity congruence, self-acceptance and compensatory motivations, I examine the different stages of the compensatory consumption process separately for each of the four consumer types, in order to understand common characteristics as well as differences across the groups. Context at this stage will only be discussed briefly, focusing on instances where individual contextual cues are relevant for consumers in initiating their compensatory engagements. Context will be explored more fully in the following section that is devoted to studying the second research question, this time focusing not only on individual impact but also on potential interactions with other constructs (i.e. antecedents, triggers and motivations). This higher-level analysis is important in that it enables a more holistic understanding of compensatory consumption as they occur within the lifeworld of participants. In Chapter 6, I turn to exploring the remaining two research questions, focusing on the compensatory consumption continuum and the role of compromise in consumer experiences.

5-B. Compensatory consumption – a processual approach

During the earlier parts of this thesis, I advocated a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption, emphasising the importance of pre- and post-consumption periods that capture antecedents, behavioural acts and consequences. This is important as the majority of existing studies in the field portray compensatory consumption as a single isolated behaviour associated with an independent event like purchasing a piece of clothing or buying a piece of furniture (Kim & Gal, 2014). Such a snapshot approach is limited in that it is likely to foster a categorical view of compensatory consumption, with the emphasis placed only on the presence of this phenomenon, with no consideration of its absence, as determined by a specific consumer action. Furthermore, such a snapshot view disregards the role of the greater context and process in which the compensatory act takes place (Fournier & Guiry, 1993; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998).

Thus far only a few scholars have pursued a processual approach in their work, where they argued that the pre- and post-acquisition periods during a compensatory process were often more meaningful for individuals than the single act of purchase (Fournier & Guiry, 1993; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles, & Elliott, 2002b; Woodruffe-Burton et al., 2002a; Woodruffe-Burton & Wakenshaw, 2011). The results of the present thesis will demonstrate consistency and alignment with

this orientation, as participants in their consumer stories reflect upon the importance of the pre- and post-consumption periods during their compensatory engagements.

In support of a comprehensive approach and in order to achieve a fuller understanding of how the discussion of the results will proceed, certain additional points need to be emphasised. First, given the combined effect of predispositions, triggers and motivations, these factors will sometimes be reflected upon simultaneously, as they emerge in such a way throughout the consumers' stories. Consequently, findings will be discussed more broadly by separating the consumption process into pre-acquisition, acquisition and post-acquisition stages. Although the aim is to keep these three stages relatively separate, some extent of cross-over will be inevitable and will be specifically noted, as they surface together in the consumer accounts.

Second, as demonstrated by the results, consumer history as it pertains to compensatory consumption will also become relevant, further accentuating the importance of a comprehensive lifeworld view. Finally, the holistic approach advocated in the present research is advantageous given its sensitivity to identify additional and more subtle variations across the four consumer clusters in terms of the overall prevalence of compensatory consumption in the lifeworld of participants. In particular, during the discussion of the compensatory consumption process, it will become apparent that some stages are more emphasised throughout the stories of some consumer groups than others, which will be highlighted accordingly throughout the respective discussions.

I now turn to exploring the compensatory consumption process, with a detailed analysis concerning the pre-acquisition, acquisition and post-acquisition stages across the four consumer clusters.

5-B.1. Consumer cluster 1: Unhappy idealists

The first group of participants, the unhappy idealists, included Hannah, Heidi, Flavia, Flora, Pamela, Paulo and Petra. This cluster could be best characterised by the large discrepancy between their actual and ideal self-states and their persistent consumer motivation to pursue their ideal selves. The label assigned to them includes the term 'unhappy' to reflect that the ideal self they chase is highly unrealistic and largely unattainable, yielding to a persistently frustrated and unhappy state. Not surprisingly, compensatory consumption instances were quite common in the case of this group, which is also reflected in the breadth and depth of examples emerging throughout their interviews. For members of this group, compensatory cycles frequently incorporated a combination of addictive and impulsive behaviours, together with obsessive and even compulsive tendencies.

A number of insecurities surfaced throughout the consumer stories in this group, including low self-esteem, lack of confidence, sadness, proneness to depression, childhood constraints and materialistic tendencies; often operating in combination. These will be discussed in detail in the following sections. Consumers often talked about their ideals and the way they would like to see themselves and be seen by others, entertaining a belief that it was an attainable target. In fact, most participants were able to articulate their perceptions concerning their ideal selves and situations quite

readily, and consumer goods and experiences played an important role in this endeavour. However, as demonstrated below, consumers found it difficult to achieve this ideal, resulting in frustrations, regret and compensatory relapses. The multitude of forces at play during the pre-acquisition stage is important as a range of predispositions, triggers and motivations collectively influenced compensatory consumption for this group, also yielding to the greatest array and representation of compensatory engagements across the four consumer types.

5-B.1.a. Pre-acquisition stage

When considering their pre-acquisition stage, several predispositions, triggers and motivations seemed to operate in combination to initiate compensatory engagements. The first group showcased persistent and enduring fears, needs and insecurities, including low self-confidence, low self-esteem, proneness to sadness, depression, conspicuous and obsessive tendencies, and constraints to independence during childhood and earlier life stages. These participants were unhappy with their present life, often projected a lack of purpose and professional frustrations, which in turn resulted in perceptions of a suboptimal sense of achievement. Their primary insecurities surfaced repeatedly throughout their stories, which – especially in combination – were difficult to overcome.

Antecedents - Predispositions

A frequently referenced source of insecurity related to *weight* and *physical appearance*, which seemed to exert a direct influence on compensatory consumption. Hannah talked about her constant battle with food, overeating, not knowing when to stop, and not being able to stick to a lighter diet; behaviours which reflect addictive tendencies. Consequently, she found going to stores that only carried small sizes frustrating as it served as a reminder for her to lose weight. She preferred going to stores that carried larger sizes where she felt more comfortable and more likely to find a suitable item.

In terms of eating habits, I try to eat healthy, although I always had some weight problems. I have this past in my family, these are problems for me, the quantity of the food. I never seem to be able to just eat the amount that I need. And I have a hard time to control it. And this is a big fight, it's a constant fight. And I have some periods that I am doing better, but most of the time worse. And I know that this is a big problem of mine. [...] I really like clothing stores, probably because I'm also a woman, but mostly the bigger ones. I don't like small boutiques. Probably part of the reason is that the small boutiques have smaller sizes, and I suppose I don't bother going in because most likely I would not find anything for myself and would be frustrated. [...] And then I often end up in my favourite stationary store or buy some accessory. Like a necklace or a scarf or something. Those are great. They make me happy. And they are safe, you know?" (Hannah)

Seeing smaller sizes served as a reminder for Hannah of her desire to lose weight, and her frustrations of feeling 'suboptimal' often initiated compensatory consumption engagements of purchasing stationary or other accessories that she considered 'safe'.

Paulo voiced similar struggles concerning his weight, which appeared in combination with other lifestyle choices such as exercising, healthy eating and being productive at work. During times when he managed to get enough exercise, he became thinner and more fit, felt more positive about himself, and in turn felt able to wear anything he wanted. During other times, however, when he did not maintain

his controlled posture, he easily slipped, which had far-reaching – and rapid – negative consequences impacting his overall well-being and self-perception.

“So for example if I’m, I easily put on weight, so if I don’t do any, if I’m not careful, and all of a sudden, I wake up. All it takes is two days, not doing anything, and all of a sudden, it’s bad. On one of those days, I go out and I buy stuff, I feel like a fat slob. I’m, you know dressed up in something, you know. Which is worse... So when I feel OK, I exercise, write, then I kind of, I don’t care, because I got the bases covered. I can wear what I want to, I can... It’s like, I can, you know, I don’t worry about... And I feel kind of, you know... Like Jean Paul Belmondo or Sean Penn.” (Paulo)

Paulo’s comments describing the rapid decline that followed a brief period of weakness are interesting, in that they demonstrate the constant attention required to maintain an ideal situation. Importantly, the relationship between predispositions and the phenomenon of compensatory consumption is particularly clear in Paulo’s quote, making references to ‘going out and buying stuff’ which in turn made him feel like ‘a fat slob’, as opposed to feeling like a celebrity when physical appearances and other aspects of his ideal self-state were more closely approximated.

In addition to weight, several *negative emotional dispositions* such as low self-esteem, general sadness and depressive tendencies surfaced repeatedly in multiple accounts, which – together with various triggers – often made consumers susceptible to compensatory engagements. Hannah considered herself too weak and prone to giving into social pressures and doing things she disliked; such as excessive eating or drinking, particularly in the presence of others when exposed to peer-pressure. For Petra, everything seemed better in her home country of Switzerland, despite her firm decision to move away given the lack of schooling options for her children, the high cost of living, and the generally limited professional options for her and her husband. She also felt dependent in many ways on others, which made her feel depressed and without a sense of purpose.

Paulo also reflected upon periods of his life when he battled with depression. He kept referring to his ideal self on multiple occasions throughout his interview and his compensatory consumption stories; whether triggered by his weight, his low self-esteem, his suboptimal professional standing, or his work-related frustrations and mediocre outputs. His accounts revealed an interesting dichotomy between having a high self-confidence together with low self-esteem, which he referred to as almost being ‘two different people’.

“I had a couple of years that were really horrible. It’s like everything else. If you think about it, if you are healthy versus if there’s something that is physically threatening you. So I had some depression, deep depression. It was awful. [...] My ups are really up there, and my downs are really bad, and the worst possible sort of form. And a lot of it has to do with me being able to really you know, if I exercise, if I write, there has to be some output. If it’s just me, if it’s just the dumbing down the pain, it’s not good. [...] I’ve never had a lot of, my self-confidence is very very high, but my self-esteem is probably not very high. So when the shit hits the fan, I know that. I know what I can do, and I know exactly what... But I don’t know. Maybe, I don’t know if it’s low self-esteem. But it’s like two different people.” (Paulo)

Professional frustrations were highly prevalent in several consumer accounts. Paulo, for instance, being genuinely unhappy with his current personal and career situation, mentioned repeatedly that his life and professional opportunities would be far superior should he live and work outside of Portugal. He felt forced to relocate a few years back for family reasons and revealed concerns about not meeting

his expectations regarding his career accomplishments. Similar insecurities surfaced throughout Flora's interview as well. She has been searching for a job for years, often progressing through multiple rounds of interviews, but nonetheless remaining unsuccessful in securing employment. This presented a recurrent insecurity and growing anxiety for her, as she knew she would need to be careful with her spending. She received some income from her existing investments, but these were not sufficient to sustain the quality of life she was accustomed to – and would otherwise desire. This was particularly an issue considering Flora's strong need for independence.

“Yeah, when I'm working obviously, I am less likely to feel guilty, and I'm just. I don't feel guilty. Just when I see something, I like I just buy it. But now I am more likely not to buy it, because obviously I am not working, but every 6 months, or every 4 months, yeah, I just become a little spontaneous. [...] I feel guilty all the time when I spend money on things that I really don't need. Quote me on that one. Spend money on things you really don't need. And we really don't need. Well, when you are not earning an income, you always feel guilty a little bit. A little bit. But it's fine. If I earned money, I wouldn't think of it. I just want to stress I do receive an income, but it is not as much I would if I was actually earning my own money.” (Flora)

Interestingly, this quote is in striking contrast with Flora's earlier admission of only making purchases driven by need. Furthermore, not earning an income appeared to serve as an important predisposition towards compensatory consumption for Flora. Yet whenever she realised that her consumption was not need-based, she often experienced feelings of guilt. Other consumers voiced similar concerns regarding their professional situation. Flavia, for instance, made recurrent references to her current unemployed status. She pursued some voluntary engagements, but they were not sufficient to enable her to keep up with her preferred shopping style.

“It's different. Because in the States I definitely, I used to get like slobbering trash magazines as I like to call them to really see what people, like fashion stuff was, and I would normally go and see the fashion shows. You know in Paris in the heart of fashion it's I guess I don't actively seek it because... I know I'm not in the market. For that sort of stuff right at this second. But in the States, I was working and stuff and I was always going out for work stuff. So I would always make sure that something was going to be in style or coming in style and so that I had something along those lines. Here I just try to make sure that I kind of fit in, and you know, look cute, but it's a little bit different here I guess because of being one earner situation.” (Flavia)

Fitting in was an important and persistent consideration for Flavia, and throughout her interview she made repeated references to emphasise this point. She realised she was unable to keep up with her usual consumer style, and instead found alternative compensatory ways – such as browsing in high-end department stores and window shopping – to confirm to herself her fit with her consumer reality.

Childhood experiences and constraints exerted another lasting impact on individuals' consumption in the first group, with many participants wanting to compensate for earlier restrictions, controls or overbearing parental role models. Hannah, for instance, talked about her modest upbringing that often resulted in her lack of ability to get what she wanted. She recalled specific instances in her life as an adult trying to compensate for these earlier experiences, not always successfully.

“I think it also is related to the fact that when I was a kid, I didn't have too much clothing. What I had I didn't like too much. I didn't always get what I really wanted. And this is related as well. I try for my kids to get things that they would like, that they would desire, not only those that they need, but even within that things that are better. So I compensate a lot. and for me too, I try. And I go through phases. When we weren't doing so well financially, I still remember those times, and I would really think about any purchase a lot. And these reactions stick with you. That I still think a lot. Perhaps now we could be a bit more lenient, but I still continue to think a

lot about what to buy. and the main consideration is what I need. But then from time to time it comes in still that shoot, I really deserve this right now. Or I really need it. For some other reason. And then this feeling enters.” (Hannah)

In her quote, Hannah refers to compensatory engagements in relation to her as well as her children, which are linked with the constraints to which she was exposed as a child. Heidi also expressed negative connotations regarding her financial restrictions while growing up which led to compensatory tendencies that she wanted to eliminate from her adult life as her family now was better off. She also discussed at length the traditional gender roles to which she has been exposed during her upbringing that had an influence on her own behaviours as an adult.

“And I know that this is really a part of my family and history. And for instance, this is something that I love about my husband. They also had a simple life, and did not have too much money, as he comes from an intellectual family that didn't have much means, but they still went out from time to time. For instance, he has a memory when his sister at the age of three sent back the potatoes because she ordered and wanted to eat pasta with her dish. I don't have any of these memories. So for me, it is important for this reason as well. Not just because I had enough, but also because of the added meaning. That is also allows me to break out from this style of life that I don't want to relate to; at least to some parts of it. And that is why it's important for me.” (Heidi)

The above section demonstrates that childhood experiences and parental role models were a consistent theme for this group. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the majority of the references made had a negative tone. Consumers in this group wanted to break away from unpleasant consumer memories from their childhood, which they reflected upon as limiting their personal independence and free choice, leading to recurrent compensatory encounters. Flora, for instance, recalled that as a child her mother dictated her and her sister's clothing choices, and as an adult she has been trying to break away from this to mark her own distinct style. She continued to emphasise this point repeatedly as a reflective nuisance in her consumption experiences even as an adult. Part of this seemed to be linked with her lack of employment, which was needed to assert her sense of independence and be able to break away from her mother's influence.

Status and materialistic tendencies emerged as important predispositions throughout many consumer stories as well. Pamela, who already concentrated most of her consumption on mid- to high-end luxury brands, projected an idealised image where she saw herself working for a large organisation and earning more money. This in turn would enable her to wear professional designer suits, which she very much aspired.

“My favourite, my two brands are Guess and Michael Kors. Even though I can say that I buy more things from Guess. [...] In the future, I would see myself for example having the brands that I have now, the ones that are really difficult to buy, Michael Kors I feel that are really expensive for me. I would like to have it to be more accessible for me. And I would like to switch my taste to a higher level.” (Pamela)

Pamela's quote demonstrates clear conspicuous tendencies, as she used high-end brands to compensate for her lack of confidence and general insecurities. Consumption signalling status was important for Paulo as well. In particular, when reminded of his professional insecurities, he often turned to emphasise his status-bearing material preferences and possessions.

“In shopping, when we are talking about clothes and cars, houses that I bought, things... It's for me, it's just... you know, really in my life, what I want to do, is to, it's just to strive, feel OK most of the time. I had a couple of

years that were really horrible. It's like everything else. [...] But I have the 'Jag', it got me through a lot. I bought it new 16 years ago, we've been through a lot. And my house, I have a house in Sintra [a prestigious suburb of Lisbon]. It's quite big, it's nice. I'm comfortable." (Paulo)

As revealed by the above excerpt, Paulo reverted to talking about his house, his car 'the Jag', and his generally high living standards as compensation for his suboptimal professional standing or physical appearance. Flavia presented a similar picture of herself, portraying highly conspicuous and materialistic tendencies, while at the same time struggling with her lack of income.

"I'm a shopaholic. I really love to shop. And I like to go shop for, I like really nice stuff. I don't like to buy garbagem stuff. If I'm gonna buy, I'm gonna buy really good stuff. Otherwise I just won't buy it. A little bit of my problem here because I'm not working is you know, I feel bad about, you know, I used to buy more nice stuff more frequently because I was working and earning, and here I'm doing stuff but I'm just not earning, so it's like I'm not able to do the kind of shopping that I really love, I can do more window shopping than anything else and more just day to day practical stuff. But I like the designer stuff. It's a little embarrassing. But the truth is, my favourite store here in terms of nice is the Bon Marche. Because even though it is at this point you know even though I am not really buying a whole lot of stuff, it's the kind of store, the atmosphere is just beautiful. They have beautiful items, yes, it's expensive, but I never feel like I shouldn't be there, I never feel out of place, and I feel like if I really wanted something, I really could buy it. I really could buy something if I wanted to, I just, you know, I don't want to have to explain. It's a beautiful store." (Flavia)

Although current lack of employment presented a clear obstacle for Flavia, at the same time she preferred to hold out for items that she would be satisfied with. She adopted the new habit of window shopping as an activity to replace actual shopping and began to appreciate the ambience more to compensate for her restrictive consumption options and reduced ability to make an actual purchase. Although she knew she was unable to buy many things, she emphasised repeatedly that 'she had every right to be there' at the store, and if she wanted to, she could buy something.

In the case of Flora, her lack of employment and absence of an obvious purpose in her daily life often made her feel guilty about consuming. She often used consumption to compensate for her lack of independence, and to continue to participate in consumer society and receive the rush of owning luxury merchandise. Despite her financial constraints, Flora continued to pursue high end and expensive items, stories of which were generally followed by extensive rationalisation. Flora's case was also interesting as she specifically mentioned that she was not materialistic, yet several of her accounts reflected elements of status and materialism. In this sense, not being materialistic seemed more like an ideal aspiration rather than reality, as illustrated by the quote below.

"When I buy something, it's for me. I can't be a complete materialistic person. I mean I value my books. I do buy books. Diary, language courses. [...] Well, um, god, I feel so materialistic! Guys like cars, we like handbags and shoes. Well, the handbag, yeah, it's a. So silly, it's like a status symbol, I hate saying that out loud. But isn't it really just a status symbol? I mean it's so beautiful! But it's, what is it really about? What is it really about a car, I mean, I, I don't know, everyone's different. I don't know. [...] I can buy that Chanel handbag. But like if I was working, I mean after a few months, I could buy it. I would buy it. Just because it's a one off. And it's not like I have 10 thousand Chanel handbags. It's just something like, you know, one thing. You know, honestly, probably I wouldn't buy it, because it's just such a waste." (Flora)

This interview excerpt is quite rich and provides a nice demonstration of the constant fluctuation between conscious and unconscious thinking that prevailed in the case of many participants in this group. On the one hand, when consciously thinking about her consumption experiences on a more

conscious level, Flora referred to her desire to buy books and language courses or expand resources on valuable things like an educational program or a post-graduate course. At the same time, when dwelling further in depth into her stories, she switched to an ‘unconscious mode’ where status-bearing and materialistic goods surfaced with high frequency. She talked at length about a Chanel bag she had her heart set on but has not yet acquired and felt torn about discussing and deciphering her aspirational purchase during her interview. In this sense, the Chanel bag was a recurrent desired possession, Flora spoke about it with great enthusiasm and longing, she looked at the picture frequently on her phone emphasising its elegance and glamour and imagined what it would be like to own it. Her stories clearly signalled compensatory tendencies, imagining the events where she could use her desired possession, and emphasising the rush derived from the chase.

Flora’s case illustrates the frequent struggle consumers experience between their actual and ideal selves. On the one hand, she would like to see herself as someone who values education or products and experiences that espouse intellectual meaning. On the other hand, her actual material choices and the way she describes them clearly indicate an alternative state of mind, and at one point she even referred to herself as a ‘shopaholic’, similarly to Flavia. It is almost as if the experience of the interview gave her the opportunity to make sense of her own consumption and decipher her reasons for pursuing expensive merchandise, particularly in light of her lack of employment. When faced with the discomfort emerging from such discrepancy, Flora – similarly to many others in this group – tended to engage in extensive rationalisation; with further information on this provided below.

Antecedents - Triggers

The previous section presented a range of predispositions that played a role in compensatory engagements. It is important to emphasise, however, that these predispositions operated largely in the background and on the level of the unconscious, only surfacing when brought into awareness – or triggered – by a particular contextual cue, event or experience.

As a starting point for this section, the following quote represents Pamela’s attempt to contemplate her reasons to go shopping, providing a nice overview that captures the situation of many other participants as well.

“When do I shop? When I need something. If I feel that I really have to have these shoes, I will go check them out. Discounts, I do check discounts in my favourite brands, that's for sure. And then it's events, holidays, birthdays, Xmas. Because the need, you have the time. Or occasion. [...] Other times... When I really struggle to wear something. Or when I go out to a club and I sit down so upset and I think I am not going anywhere. Before I go. Because I really feel that I really don't have anything to wear. But of course, besides my main closet I have a bunch of storage and other clothes. Sometimes I visit them, yes. When I'm really troubled. Of course, I have clothes that I usually wear to work, but to go out I need something new. To have something new.” (Pamela)

This is a rich quote containing a lot of information as well as contradictions that is worthy to unpack. First, Pamela mentioned *perceived need* as the primary trigger initiating a shopping encounter, which tended to be the most common self-acclaimed reason for other consumers in the first group as well. However, she immediately followed by saying ‘if I feel I have to have something’, which is no

longer a 'need' per se in a utilitarian sense. In fact, this signals a difference between actual versus perceived needs (Gould, 1993; Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998); a phenomenon that is highly relevant for compensatory consumption.

Second, Pamela's reflection is also interesting in that it presents a certain dichotomy. On the one hand she mentions inadequate options in her closet, yet on the other hand she admits to having an abundance of clothes. This is interesting for two reasons. First, it confirms that objectively Pamela does not describe a need in a utilitarian sense of the word, and instead she seems to reflect a subjective need. On the other hand, it is interesting to see how she resolves the emerging discrepancy by identifying the need for 'novelty' as a justification for her shopping. This sequence of thinking and contemplation provides another example for the dynamic and continuously evolving nature of consumer reflections, with interviews playing an important role. In Pamela's case, the perceived need addresses a greater lack: her lack of confidence and desire for uniqueness and novelty, for which she compensates by her shopping and pursuit of luxury merchandise that is expected to make her feel special and more confident. Finally, this 'need' often arises in the presence of another trigger, such as an upcoming social event, which demonstrates that multiple triggers can be influential simultaneously in initiating compensatory engagements.

Flavia also included need as a pertinent trigger, in combination with holding out for the desired item until the right time; which in her case often coincided with traveling.

"And I really have to consider that. Like I know I love Longchamp bags. So I know and I've had them for years and years well before we moved here. So if I know that let's say my zipper is broken or I am going on a trip it's like do I go to a Longchamp store and buy it or do I hold out and buy it at the airport. The airport actually here, duty free is like the best place to buy designer stuff. The best best prices are at the airport. Better than anywhere else. Your Longchamp, your Burberry, your whoever. Airport. All the international airports, best deal is really the airport. You know, you're there, and your captive bodies, but honestly a lot of times your best deals is the duty free, especially for designer stuff. So I usually hold out for that. So it's one of those things that I will plan around that." (Flavia)

Flavia's quote makes repeated references to conspicuous and status-bearing consumption, which – within the greater compensatory cycle – is often motivated by fitting in and maintaining her participation in consumer society, despite her financial restrictions. As a coping mechanism, in addition to adopting the habit of window-shopping, Duty Free stores and trips presented further compensatory adaptations for Flavia in an attempt to cope with her general inability to shop. This echoes an earlier body of work focusing on inequalities in consumer culture and exploring the coping mechanisms adopted by families when faced with income reduction and limited spending opportunities (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006a, 2006b; Hamilton, 2009).

External and contextual cues were often mentioned as triggers by other consumers as well. These ranged from simple boredom, seasonal change or a rainy day to commercial messages and special events (e.g. Xmas and birthdays), and finally exposure to frustrating and stressful experiences. Heidi's quote below, for instance, demonstrates the role of window displays, luring her into the store.

"In that sense I changed a lot from when I was younger, and now I feel that shopping is a necessity. In the past it used to give me a lot more pleasure. But now you are faced with the consumer society that is always looking

at your wallet. The windows, everything. They really know me well. They just have to give a nice and colourful window display. That is sufficient for me to get into the store and look around.” (Heidi)

Flora admitted consuming to ‘kill time’, particularly as she was unemployed and had a lot of time to spare. The notion of time appeared in other ways as well. For some consumers, such as Heidi, when a certain amount of time she perceived as ‘long enough’ passed, she started to feel the need to buy something. This has been a recurrent theme throughout the interviews at large and will also be noticed in relation to participants in other groups.

“I also think that sometimes I think if there is a long time that passed, perhaps I go into an artisan store and buy myself something simple, like a pair of earrings or a pair of hosiery or something.” (Heidi)

Time was mentioned as another factor in the compensatory cycle. More specifically, having committed herself to making a purchase, Pamela identified the influential factor of trying to avoid ‘wasting time’, signalling an embedded compensatory engagement within a greater compensatory cycle.

“And when it’s none of these. Neither discounts, nor occasions, when I just say, I decide that OK it’s raining so I will go to a shopping mall, and I work I don’t have that much time, and I think OMG I spent four hours in a shopping mall, I just must [with emphasis] buy something. Because I used this time and not to feel that time was wasted.” (Pamela)

As a final reference to time, contextual cues were also influential in those cases when an earlier consumer need (perceived or actual) or desire has already been identified. In these instances, the role of the trigger served as a reason to move up the consumption activity in time, which in turn also provided easier follow-up justification. In Hannah’s case, this pattern surfaced in relation to wanting to reward herself for an achievement.

“Usually this reward thing works in a way that I need something, perhaps I would buy it at a later time, and I can move that time up a bit. The time gets shortened a bit. I think that this is the time when I will buy it. and then yes, I do this sometimes. And that feels good. Of course, it doesn’t last forever, and it’s a bit superficial, but I arrange it in myself, and then it’s good.” (Hannah)

Hannah’s quote demonstrates that even when an item has been identified previously as desirable, the time of the actual consumption may be modified in response to a particular contextual cue, such as a positive experience triggering self-gifting, or a negative experience triggering retail therapy. This presents an extension of the ideas presented in Table 2.3 (pp. 38), establishing a clearer distinction between self-gifting and retail therapy.

Following a positive encounter, many participants talked about sharing nice moments with friends and family, going out for a drink, or celebrating with a special treat. This pattern was quite consistent for all participants across the different groups, although with more pronounced compensatory indications in the present cluster. For instance, Flora made an interesting direct link between rewarding social encounters and other consumption activities, representing two layers within a single compensatory cycle.

“When something good happens, I have to say like, yeah, you just end up wanting to share it with someone. And that involves usually shopping before you meet that person. So then you go shopping for shoes or a dress. Or

you just go to a restaurant, or for someone's birthday you just want to go to a nice restaurant. So then you spend money.” (Flora)

In response to negative triggers, such as a conflict at home or at work, both Heidi and Hannah mentioned their desire to ‘break away’ from the environment and reward themselves with a cake or a special coffee drink; something they may not otherwise do.

“At your work when you reach a state that you just had enough, it feels really good to break out... break away from that environment.” (Heidi)

“This is the typical female reaction to something. If something bad happens, or something tense, then a self-rewarding reflex, like ‘screw you’, I am still going to feel good, and I’m going to do what is not allowed. Because normally of course someone doesn’t eat or drink these kinds of things on a daily basis. And I tend to do this sometimes. When I really am tense, and really nervous, and I can find the time, this happens. This is not something that I do on a regular basis. It could be as a result of a work conflict, then I like, there what happens is, what is another extra for me is that it allows me to break away from that environment, to be somewhere else, in a place that I like, to reward myself. And this could happen based on a work or a family conflict. Obviously not every time, as it would be quite strenuous from a variety of reasons, but I think this is a really female thing. I think women do this a lot.” (Hannah)

Hannah’s quote provides an illustration for the compensatory element particularly well. When experiencing a negative event or frustration, she feels it is OK to do ‘what is not allowed’ (i.e. in this case having a luscious cake or supreme coffee drink). The tense situation brought her out of balance, and in such cases going beyond the ‘normal’ seemed OK to restore her state of equilibrium. Interestingly, she noted repeatedly that in her view these behaviours mostly occurred in the case of women, positioning a gender differential in her mind on compensatory comportments.

Motivations

Compensatory engagements were largely motivated by consumers’ *desire to close the gap between their actual and ideal selves*. When faced with an encounter that disturbed their balance, such as a work or family conflict in Heidi’s case, ‘having had enough’ in Hannah’s, ‘slipping and feeling like a fat slob’ in Paulo’s, or facing an upcoming social outing with ‘nothing to wear’ in Pamela’s case, they seemed to be particularly likely to engage in compensatory consumption activities that would enable them to restore an ideal equilibrium along with a more positive view of themselves. Interestingly, many consumers believed that once they were able to address a given shortcoming or discrepancy in their life, other things would fall in place as well. For instance, despite her additional weight and recurrent struggles, Heidi felt that once she adopted a routine, all else would be good.

“I used to do sports for 3 hours per day when I was younger. And I think that is an important balance for your body. I run around a lot now as well, with my additional 25 kilos, but I do feel that I am much more cumbersome than before. I think that once I get back to a routine of some sort, everything else will fall in place too.” (Heidi)

Material possessions were often motivated by consumers’ *desire to mark their independence*, which in turn led them to engage in conspicuous forms of consumption. For instance, in order to compensate for her mother’s overbearing influence, Flora described her own fashion style as deliberately different from that of her mother, as well as from her childhood consumer self.

“Growing up... I mean it was nice, we were a bit, we went to an international school growing up. I went to an international school, and we were kind of, like diplomat kids. We were quite privileged if I'm really honest. We lived in a bubble. But having said that, my mother was still kind of. I mean the stuff we wore was high quality, but let's just say, but I didn't dictate what I had. So only at university, when I moved to London when I was 18, when I started to decide what I would wear and stuff. [...] Cause if I'm really honest, when I was growing up, yes even at high school, my mother, my parents used to obviously pay for everything, my mother was the one who more or less dictated what we were going to wear. She was quite controlling. So I didn't really have much of a choice, to be honest, until I went to university. And of course, I wanted to have more of a choice. It wasn't cool stuff she chose. She didn't even let us wear jeans.” (Flora)

Related to seeking independence, Heidi often admitted to feeling pressured and bound by gender roles, family traditions, cultural norms and societal expectations that she wanted to break away from. She viewed herself as a rebel, with her clothing choices and colourful housing decorations representing her attempt to address these needs.

Perhaps the roles that we continue, unfortunately, from what we brought. [...] I can get out and break away from my old lifestyle. And I can get different things. I think these thoughts are even more prevalent as we get older. I usually say that there are things that you do the same way as your parents. But then there are other things that you would do completely differently. For instance, when I was a kid, my parents would never take me out, we would never go to restaurants or coffee shops, in the peasant world this was considered a sin. You could only eat at home. But of course, my parents have changed a lot already, but you still are reminded a lot. That you didn't give the exact price or something. And I know that this is really a part of my family and history. And I'm trying to do things differently. (Heidi)

Along these lines, compensatory engagements provided a form of *escape* for Paulo, particularly following his divorce and when experiencing difficulties in life. He reflected upon changing his style completely at certain points of time, purchasing things that were strikingly different from his earlier style and appearance.

“But OK, when I had the situation, my marriage broke up, and I decided to rejuvenate for about like 20 years, I'm still 33 [laughing], I decided to go on a shopping spree, and I bought all kinds of, like two years ago, so I bought October 2015, I bought loads of denim, tight denim, you wouldn't want to see me in them. Sort of, you know, very gay-ish like things. Complete changes. And I was so in a, I bought some denim some tight stuff. And I still remember the... The stuff, I bought some sweatshirts, you know, things.” (Paulo)

Related to escape, Flora viewed her consumption experience as a way to bring a little joy to her life. In the following quote, she talks about a pair of Jimmy Choo shoes that she bought recently, describing the circumstances and her feelings surrounding the experience. It is important to note that despite her positive connotations, Flora rapidly reverted to feeling guilty about her spending, which in turn made the joyful moments largely transient. This will be elaborated upon further in the section devoted to the post-acquisition stage.

“Oh, that's interesting. So what provoked me? The moment, the thought it my head that life is short, and I usually deprive myself. But it was after I saw the shoes. It's a very impulsive, what's the word I'm looking for, yeah, impulsive by kind of *carpe diem*, enjoy, enjoy. I mean it's not exactly an investment. I think it's more special to kind of go on a travel the world, well, I do travel. Usually every year I travel. But right now I am not spending, I am trying not to spend money. So I'm always kind of like, maybe this is the little stuff that makes me a little, it brings me a little joy, you know. Cause I feel, yeah. But I think my situation is rather unique at present. Because usually I am working and I don't have to think.” (Flora)

In her own struggle, Pamela sought support from the clothes she bought and the material goods she owned.

“Because I buy things for myself, especially the dress that I like, because they help me to feel more confident and happier, but I also want to look good socially. I don't know, you buy some dress or shoes, one thing I buy for myself to feel confident, and another thing if you want to impress guys or men. [...] I find shopping exciting. Tiring. And it's also great. Some people go parachuting to have adrenalin. But I think I have some even from shopping. It is, even when you are alone, you see people. You see actually what's happening right now. You are out of work, you see what's fashionable or not. Yes, it's enjoyable. I take it more seriously than others.” (Pamela)

Pamela's quote reveals a highly emotional charge, which is common in compensatory engagements. She mentioned a number of interesting aspects that were captured by the shopping experience in her case, both pertaining to motivations as well as foreshadowing consequences of compensatory behaviours during the post-acquisition stage. Feeling happy, confident, looking good socially, pursuing excitement or an adrenalin high, and keeping up with trends were amongst the most recurrent motivations in her case, addressing underlying insecurities that drove compensatory engagements. As another interesting point raised by Pamela's quote, the expectations consumers hold during the pre-acquisition stage regarding the products, the consumption experience and the anticipated post-acquisition feelings tend to be so unrealistically high that in a way easily set them up for failure and disappointment.

On a related point, in response to her *need for uniqueness*, Pamela described a connection between her anticipation of how she would feel while wearing a particular outfit, the novelty and/or extent of comfort and reassurance obtained from the item, and the level of confidence she would experience while using it. She also emphasised the importance of appearing ‘in the picture’ with the particular possession, clearly signalling that the longevity and sharing aspect associated with social media appearances were of concern for her. Compensation here largely conspicuous and comes from pursuing new items to make up for lack of confidence and fear of inadequate social evaluation that for Pamela present enduring insecurities.

Uniqueness was often combined with seeking novelty and self-gifting, such as in the case of Flora who brought up examples of an upcoming special occasion or starting a new relationship. As her quote illustrates, she considered people to be more likely to buy things when falling in love.

“Just last week, I bought some sexy lingerie, when you have a new relationship you are more inspired to. Yeah, but what else. Yeah, I bought, no I just bought a couple of dresses. I was just new in a relationship. You know, when you are falling in love and stuff. And you end up wearing all the outfits in your wardrobe, and you just feel like wearing something brand new. To be honest when I am in a relationship, I am more likely to shop. It's kind of sad, but it's honest. It's honest. You are kind of in a very 'la vie est belle' mode. And yeah, then you just. Yeah, lately, but they were, I think one of them was on sale or something. But I mean, I went to Sandro, I didn't go to Chanel. Sandro. Yeah, there are really nice dresses.” (Flora)

Although this quote is used to demonstrate the role of novelty as a motivation, there is a clear reference to the experience of ‘falling in love’ that in this case serves as a trigger to justify Flora's self-gifting engagements.

Finally, *positive social feedback* was an important motivation for several consumers in this cluster. Although further details will be discussed below during the section devoted to the role of context, it is important to at least mention the impact of the social setting as a motivating factor for many participants. Hannah, for instance, noted how positive social feedback could ‘put her in a good mood’, and she

admitted to frequently engage in specific behaviours – like dressing a certain way or cooking particular things – that would trigger anticipated social rewards. At the same time, social expectations for her sometimes carried mixed connotations, in that she also recognised that placing too much emphasis on praise and social confirmation could be exhausting.

Yesterday I was wearing a top, and several people commented that it was quite good. The style, the pattern, even the kids in the classroom said something. And there is feedback, and of course it feels good. This can put me in a good mood. And I think this is important for a woman. At least to feel that she's got good taste. That makes a difference. And so that considering herself, given her own style that she dresses appropriately, well. [...] It really matters a lot to me what other people think of me. Which is sometimes good, but sometimes bad. It can actually be mostly bad, it's quite a burden." (Hannah)

Flora also was more likely to shop when anticipating others' presence – either for a special occasion like a wedding, or to complement her wardrobe after starting a new relationship – and she always appreciated positive feedback from others.

"After you wear the dress, and your boyfriend compliments you, and everyone is like, oh, you look so good in that dress! And then you think it was worth the investment. Then I am happy." (Flora)

It is important to note that although social considerations tended to play an important role for members of this group, the needs addressed and the motivations driving these engagements nonetheless remained largely internally oriented, triggered by relevant insecurities and aiming to approximate consumer ideals. The close link between the motivations and the enduring predispositions identified in earlier sections further confirms the need for a comprehensive and processual assessment of compensatory consumption. Furthermore, while much of the propositions made in Table 2.3 (pp. 38) were confirmed, the in-depth analysis yielded to additional relevant motivations such as escape, need for uniqueness and marking consumers' independence.

5-B.1.b. Acquisition stage

The majority of consumption engagements for the unhappy idealists seemed compensatory in orientation, targeting their greater need of approximating their ideal selves, where discrepancies were easily brought into awareness by a range of triggers. In terms of behaviours during the acquisition stage, participants in the first group exhibited limited self-control and a general inability to resist temptation, which often dominated their stories, further supporting their generally compensatory posture. For this group, the act of consumption was often experienced as a nuisance, resulting in limited or no long-term need satisfaction. When thinking about their behaviours, participants seemed to appreciate the pre-acquisition stage the most, capturing the search and the chase in pursuit of a desired item. This is in line with the earlier work of Woodruffe-Burton (1998). Petra, for instance, admitted that during the period preceding the purchase itself – one that could capture days or weeks, she frequently thought about the potential purchase and contemplated what it would be like to own it.

"I think I like the part best before buying something. You know, that moment when you think, OK, I'm gonna do it. Yeah, I think probably. Right before. And when I buy, well, sometimes it's disappointing. Cause once, well, unfortunately once I have it, it's not as appealing any more. [...] As long as I don't have it, there's this thing of, like I need this thing. Or I want it. But then once it's yours, I mean it's great, but then I realise that well, it was a

lot of money, maybe I should have done something else. Maybe it's guilt. I don't know if it's guilt. Maybe it's a little bit of guilt.” (Petra).

Although pre-acquisition periods were often discussed with elements of joy and excitement, the stage of acquisition was frequently perceived as a source of stress. Pamela, for instance, explained that although she found the shopping process quite positive overall, as it enabled her to see ‘what was going on out there’ and be up to date with recent trends, the act of purchase itself for her was stressful.

“I like shopping, but the activity doesn’t relax me. To be in huge shopping malls where there are all the brands. So I go for specific brands and specific things in mind. And I go to stores, because I can make sure that they fit me well, the clothes fit me well. And I try. And I spend, if I go to Guess, I can spend two hours in one store, so I don't make a decision very fast. I can't make a decision very fast. Or for example sometimes I check online first to see in general what I like, and I go to look in stores for specific things.” (Pamela).

In addition to material goods, individuals in this group also struggled with various addictive tendencies, including smoking, excessive drinking and the over-consumption of food. This signals that a wide range of addictive behaviours may operate alongside with other compensatory consumption engagements, serving as one of the outlets permeating the experiences of members in this group. Along these lines, when discussing their ideal selves, the image participants painted was of a person who was healthy, fit and responsible. The actual reality, however, was often quite the opposite, in turn triggering compensatory reactions. For example, when talking about a turbulent and ‘decadent’ period in his life, Paulo discussed his smoking habits and his attachment to cigarettes. The following quote presents an honest reflection about further details regarding his behaviour, capturing a form of compensatory escape from his daily sorrows and seeking refuge and reward from his habit.

“It's funny, I tell you something about smoking. My veranda, it's I used to go to the veranda, when I used to smoke. And not anymore, I don't go out, because I don't smoke. Because I can walk out, and look at things, but when I was smoking, it was a completely different process. I had a friend, me and my cigarette. And I would go there, and I really enjoyed it. And now I no longer go to the veranda.” (Paulo)

As a further analogy to addictions, some consumers appeared quite obsessed in their pursuit of certain items, wanting to avoid the risk of not being able to acquire the desired good. This is in line with the increasing literature on FOMO (fear of missing out) and will be further explored in Chapter 7. Petra described a specific experience with a consumption event that concerned a pair of shoes, indicating highly obsessive compartments.

“Oh yes, gosh, I love it! Unfortunately! It's very creepy.. I think I'm probably a little bit, how to say this, addicted, or something? Because I think it has the same patterns probably of an addict. Because, for instance, when I see something, let's say I see it on the Internet. I saw a pair of shoes, and I say, OK, I like them, and I saw them on God knows who on the street, or in the magazine, or whatever. So of course, I only think about it. But I have the feeling that if I don't have them, my life will be horrible, and not even worth living, probably. So there is this thing of, looking, and no no no no, and then looking again, and convincing myself. If I have the chance to go and look at it in real, I will do it. And then I try to convince myself that no, it's too expensive for what it is, and anyway, it's just a fashion thing. But of course, it doesn't work, and then I go back, and I keep thinking about. And then [with emphasis] when I buy it, it can stay in the closet for months! It's funny, huh?” (Petra)

Petra’s quote is rich in showcasing a range of contradictory thoughts and emotions, incorporating positive as well as negative elements, highs and lows, conscious and unconscious modes of thinking, and the combined experience of joy and guilt. The item remaining in the closet for months is interesting

in and of itself for several reasons. First, it separates the pre-purchase and post-purchase stages quite drastically from one another. Second, it re-iterates an earlier point according to which the ‘chase’ and the pre-purchase stage tend to be most enjoyable – as well as relevant – for this group, with less emphasis on the actual purchase or post-consumption usage. Despite her extensive efforts that went into the pursuit, Petra seemed to be indifferent about the shoes once she acquired them. This foreshadows her post-acquisition stage of usage, which was distinctly separate from the hype of the pre-acquisition stage that focused on the chase. Finally, despite her general espoused image of herself as a need-based utilitarian consumer, Petra in her stories used words like ‘creepy’, ‘addicted’, ‘same patterns as an addict’, and for example in the case of the shoes, seemed highly fixated on the particular item. These behaviours signal ‘classic’ compensatory elements incorporating addictive and compulsive tendencies.

As a final point concerning the acquisition stage, consumption engagements for members in this cluster were cyclical rather than self-contained; another connection linking compensatory behaviours with other addictive types of consumption. This is likely to be associated with the important role of enduring insecurities – such as low self-esteem, low confidence, or recurrent discontent with physical appearance – which were persistent and challenging to remedy.

5-B.1.c. Post-acquisition stage

The period immediately following a purchase demonstrated interesting trends for members of this group, and participants displayed a wide array of contradicting emotions that ranged from some fun and excitement to predominantly guilt and regret. As demonstrated already by the stories and quotes throughout earlier sections, guilt and regret were common post-purchase emotions, frequently accompanied by rationalisations and justifications. Flora, for instance, expressed a sense of guilt associated with consuming given her lack of employment status, and when being reminded of her insecurity, she reverted to justifications of not taking extravagant holidays like her friends, or earning income from her foreign property investments. As another strategy when a particular purchase did not turn out well, she coped by shifting the blame towards another person – either her sister or a sales associate – for ‘forcing’ her into buying a particular item.

“There is this Louis Vuitton bag, handbag, I have to blame my sister she kind of forced me to buy it in my first year in Paris in 2009. And I have literally worn it three times over the past 8 years. Three times. It's such a waste of 900 euros! And it's brand new, and I can't sell it, because, you know, unless I sell it at a discount. [...] I had a very negative experience once, although it happened so long ago. But I still remember. There was this, I went to a store, I was a teenager, must have been around 17, and yeah anyway, we had received pocket money at the time. But, or maybe, I wasn't more than 20. And I, there was this, I went to this store, and it was all very, there was this jacket that I spent so much money on. At the time, I don't know, the seller was convincing me that it was really good, and at that very moment I actually thought that it looked pretty cool, and I purchased it, it was a ridiculous amount of money, and I don't, I never wore it. I think I wore it once. Anyway, that's a rare occurrence. And then you think it's a total waste.” (Flora)

This point will be revisited in Chapter 7 concerning its ramifications for successful consumer-staff interactions. As a related coping strategy, Heidi talked about shifting her mindset from reward or self-gifting to positioning a purchase – ex-poste – as a need.

“But I don't consider these gifts to myself. I don't usually buy gifts for myself. I can just say that it's a necessity. I explain it away, I really needed it.” (Heidi)

Rather than admitting a purchase as a gift to herself, Heidi chose to reposition it as a need to make her feel better. This is interesting in that it signals how post-acquisition views of a compensatory behavioural act can be negotiated and repositioned with further contemplation, shifting it from being unjustified to being justified.

Regret surfaced repeatedly in several of Petra's accounts as well. As she described a specific purchase she made, she admitted to feeling ashamed by it, and chose to leave the item in her closet pretending it was not there. Although similar sentiments emerged in other consumer stories as well, interestingly none of the participants ever seemed to return a purchased item.

“Sometimes things stay in my closet, not every time. Not all the time. Maybe it probably it happens with the things that, not that I regret, but the buys that I'm a little bit ashamed of, the ones that I shouldn't have made, probably. Kind of pretend it's not there. No no, I didn't do it, it wasn't me. But then it keeps staying there, and at some point, I take it out.” (Petra)

Petra's quote reflects upon a form of denial, with her expressions like ‘I didn't do it, it wasn't me’, reflecting upon her feelings of shame and regret in her post-acquisition experience. Pamela's stories showcased a great mixture of positive and negative emotions following a particular purchase. At first, she tended to find the consumption per se stressful, then admitted to experiencing a post-purchase shock. But then with the passing of time and after further contemplation and positive confirmation from her social circle, she was able to feel happy about her purchase and – at least for a period of time – seemed to enjoy her new possession.

“I can say that I have post purchase shock very often. I'm not one of those types of girls that it relaxes me. Actually, at the time of purchase and the process does not relax me that much. But when I am at home, when I actually have it, I bought it... So first I am a bit shocked, OMG, I spent that money, do I really need it, or, those kinds of feelings. When I take it home, I try it on. I take some pictures, I send some pictures home to my mom, or to my friends. And they approve. Not sure if they are truthful, but they always approve. Then I usually leave it out. And then after all when I actually use it the whole year then I am so happy. So first I don't know a culture chock, but then after all I am really happy.” (Pamela)

Pamela's quote signals the existence of multiple phases of post-acquisition, capturing experiences that ranged from post purchase shock to actual enjoyment of usage. Gratification was quite limited, however, and was contingent upon continued positive social feedback, confirming the continuous evaluation of the new possessions. The obvious role of social feedback also indicates that enduring predispositions are not only influential for compensatory purchases during the pre-acquisition stage but can linger into the post-acquisition period as well.

These reflections also give rise to another important and somewhat contradictory point. On the one hand, given that material possessions bring little value and no long-term gratification to these consumers, it is not surprising that most of them do not seem to develop strong relationships with their possessions. In fact, although most consumers talk about using the items they buy, some of their purchases remain hidden in their closet unopened for a long period of time and some never get used. On the other hand, there are certain isolated instances that reflect rather strong attachment. Paulo's story

about his car and Pamela's description of her special floral jacket, and Flavia's raving about her shoe collection – as outlined below – provide a good demonstration for this.

Paulo talked about his car (the 'jag') that he owned for many years, thinking of all the common experiences he and the car had together.

"And it's the, you develop, I think it has to do with products sharing some meaningful painful experience with you, you somehow develop and attachment to that. And also, products that are painful, meaningful, you know, psychologically painful, because they were with you, or they shared your time and space, at a time in your life when you were vulnerable, when you did not feel OK. And these things were there for you, and they managed to get you home, and so on and so on. The car does that. The bike too. Also, you have the bike, when you are going down, you feel vulnerable. It's like you rely on a mechanical thing to, which is inanimate, but at the same time you somehow transfer human qualities to this, because you, you know, it takes you there. You don't fall on the ground, so that's it. So that is the way. So you develop a relationship with products." (Paulo)

Pamela's description of her floral jacket resembled similar sentiments that emphasised the role of attachment to special possessions and their influence on the consumer's self.

"This is a flower jacket, it's special. Actually, it's one year old. I got it for my birthday last year. It shows an example that I bought for an occasion which was for my birthday. Flowers. I love flowers. So this pattern for me, I am obsessed with flowers. It was the birthday thing. And why is it so special? It's one year old, not that new. Every time I walk into a place, everyone just loves it. I feel that people like it. And they give compliments, very nice jacket at work, nice jacket in a club, nice jacket. So it's something that I thought was a really great purchase. And hearing compliments, sometimes clothes are nice, but somehow this jacket continues, constantly gets feedback. And even when I entered a Guess store, everyone was like, it was like a brand walking model, because everyone recognises, even at the Guess store, people said it was a great item. It just makes me happy." (Pamela)

Finally, Flavia raved about her shoe collection, along with other high-end and status-signalling possessions which she considered timeless.

"I guess I would definitely make sure to bring the shoe collection. I just love shoes. I love them all. In their own unique special ways, they are seasonal stuff, or day to day. I love them all. Jackets, all that stuff, Burberry scarf, those are kinds of things that I know I would just want, because those are classics. And no matter when and how, they will always be in style." (Flavia)

These quotes are interesting and deserve further contemplation. Although members of this group seldom placed much emphasis on individual possessions and tended to move on quickly to pursuing the 'next new thing', there seemed to be some exceptions. Apparently, at least on some occasions, individuals were able to prolong and deepen their usage of and relationship with a particular possession, as long as it continued to provide meaningful benefits over time. Paulo recalled the many – often painful – experiences he shared with his 'Jag', the extent to which he could rely on the car almost as a stable friend, which in turn resulted in positive perceived evaluations. The car represented status and uniqueness; characteristics that were important for Paulo in his quest for an ideal self. For Pamela, the floral jacket was able to continuously yield the desired social feedback that gave her a confidence boost, and hence she could talk highly positively about her special possession even after one year of ownership – a time that for her seemed unusually long. Finally, Flavia could talk about her shoe collection and some timeless possessions with a highly positive emotional charge, suggesting elements of product attachment. These examples demonstrate that on some occasions, compensatory engagements were successful for these consumers in bringing along some appreciation, even if temporary.

Nevertheless, despite these exceptions that were rather sporadic, the majority of compensatory attempts were largely unsuccessful, leading to minimal or complete lack of need satisfaction. In other words, consumers' attempts were often short-lived and were unlikely to result in need fulfilment or satisfaction in the medium to long-term. Some consumers – when operating in a conscious and rational mode – were able to articulate reasons why material goods should not be the answer to their pursuit of happiness. For instance, Paulo reflected that material goods alone were not sufficient, and he made an analogy of a Christmas tree to represent himself as the 'essence', and the decorations that represented the material world.

"Yeah, material things are kind of... they're not... for me they're not replacing essence. You need to have an essence. And then, like decorations on a Xmas tree, but they're not the Xmas tree. That's probably a good analogy. So for example, I can't just, I can't sort of buy stuff, and build something on, you know.. If there's nothing. [...] Yeah, you gotta have an essence. Yeah, exercise, for example, you know, I've got a, I really need to be... I can't fake excellence. I need to do things. And I'm very, there's a kind of dichotomy here, in my... I either feel great or I feel like shit. I really do. Products are, they are a good anchor, I realised lately, they're a good anchor. Especially now, I exercise a lot, I go running in the morning, late afternoon I cycle, and during the day I write. And that frees me to do all these things that I've been self-conscious about. Having stuff, I mean clothes and so on, is like an anchor to these things. It's like, you've done your exercise, you've done your work, you don't feel guilty, you're ok, more or less, but you're not self-conscious, and then you take a shower, and then you dress up in something, and then you feel ok. You feel ok with yourself." (Paulo)

Petra painted a similar picture when thinking about her own possessions. Despite her occasionally obsessive pursuit of certain items, in her quote she admitted that material goods would not make her a happier person, and they did not define who she was.

"The older I get the less things matter to me actually. Because well, in the end it doesn't define who I am, it doesn't make me better or worse. And the people who... If I know people, and they think that I'm better because I have this or that, I don't really want them in my life. So I don't really care. I used to, yeah, but not anymore. I think here it's different. In Switzerland it was different too. There's a lot of competition in Switzerland. And... Don't get me wrong, I like to have a nice house, and feel good in my house, and I still would like to have a nice lamp, and a sofa, and all that, but it's not gonna make me happier. I think." (Petra)

These quotes illustrate the mixed perceptions material possessions represented to individuals in this group, and the continuous struggle consumers faced when trying to make sense of their consumption decisions. In line with Paulo's reflections, it seems that the 'essence' for these individuals could be approximated by being in shape, having the 'right' weight, pursuing the 'appropriate' lifestyle, or being confident and independent; attributes that were associated with an ideal self. As long as these ideals were met, individuals became less self-conscious, more self-accepting, and better off in general. When these ideals were not met, however, which was the majority of the time given the large discrepancy between their actual and ideal self-states, material goods were unable to help consumers remedy the gap, resulting in new compensatory relapses.

5-B.1.d. Summary

The most unifying theme for unhappy idealists was their permanent chase of an ideal self that tended to be overly ambitious and largely unattainable, leading to recurrent frustrations. Consumers aspired to act in ways that were personally and socially desirable, but in reality, were often faced with

a discrepancy between their actual consumption habits and their idealised consumer identity. The interviews seemed to raise awareness of consumers' compensatory behaviours which they were uncomfortable owning up to. In fact, thinking and talking about consumption stories often triggered a sense of unease that participants seemed to want to correct by affirming the opposite pole of rationality and need-based consumption. This often resulted in fluctuations between sharing stories and recounting experiences, feeling overwhelmed by the discrepancy, and trying to remedy the gap by adopting coping mechanisms like denial and rationalisation. Summarising the above observations, Table 5.1 showcases the details for the compensatory consumption process associated with the participants in the first group.

TABLE 5.1 Compensatory consumption process in cluster 1: The unhappy idealists.

	Heidi	Flavia	Hannah	Pamela	Petra	Paulo	Flora
P R E A C Q U I S I T I O N	Predisposition	Low self-esteem Earlier constraints Weight	Status Materialism Narcissism Need for uniqueness Professional gap	Low self-esteem Earlier constraints Weight Lack of control	Low self-esteem Depression Need for recognition Need for uniqueness Narcissism	Sadness Depression Low self-esteem Lack of control Earlier constraints Professional gap	Low self-esteem Status Materialism Need for accomplishment Lack of control Professional gap Earlier constraints
	Trigger	Frustrations / conflict Window displays Events	Boredom Travel Special occasions Window displays	Frustrations / conflict Time Positive achievement	Upcoming event Social media Seasonal change Rainy weather Insufficient options	Boredom Window displays Travel	Contextual cues Special occasions Window displays New relationship
	Motivation	Personal needs Independence Escape Reward Healthy routine	Personal needs Uniqueness Social acceptance Passing of time	Personal needs Independence Reward Social acceptance Positive social feedback	Personal needs Hype and excitement Uniqueness Trends Social acceptance Novelty	Personal needs Independence Escape Passing of time Uplift	Personal needs Independence Uplift Uniqueness Novelty Trends
Acquisition		Cyclical Compulsive Retail therapy	Cyclical Compulsive Status Retail therapy	Cyclical Obsessive Status Conspicuous Retail therapy	Cyclical Addictive Compulsive	Cyclical Obsessive Status Conspicuous	Cyclical Obsessive Status Conspicuous
Post-acquisition		Guilt / regret Rationalisation Coping strategies	Guilt / regret Rationalisation Product attachment	Guilt / regret Joy Rationalisation	Shock Joy Product attachment	Guilt / regret Remorse Denial	Refuge Rationalisation Product attachment
							Guilt / regret Justification Rationalisation

Within the pre-acquisition stage and amongst the antecedents, consumer stories showcased a range of persistent insecurities, including sadness, depression, obsessive and materialistic tendencies, lack of confidence, low self-esteem and childhood experiences and constraints. These findings are largely consistent with the content of Table 2.3 (pp. 38), where references were made – particularly within the realm of compulsive and addictive consumption – to a range of personality attributes like self-esteem (Tommasi & Busonera, 2012) and materialism (Mueller et al., 2011), along with enduring emotional states like recurrent anxieties (Amos et al., 2014), depression and prolonged unhappiness (Verplanken & Sato, 2011), narcissism (Rose, 2007) and obsessive tendencies (D'Astous, 1990). Expanding upon the material in the table, the interviews also revealed the prevalence of weight and physical appearance, professional frustrations and childhood experiences. The role of demographics was not as pronounced in this study, most likely due to the relatively advantaged socio-economic status of participants.

As anticipated, antecedents in this group were often brought upon by different triggers. In line with the prior literature, these included sadness (Garg & Lerner, 2013), boredom (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), conflict and difficult situations (Yurchisin et al., 2006; Gaviria & Bluemelhuber, 2010), and a range of external stimuli that served as a reminder of a relevant insecurity (Dalton, 2009; Gao et al., 2009; Coleman & Williams, 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Rucker et al., 2014; Stuppy et al., 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, et al., 2015). A particularly interesting reference can be made to earlier research suggesting the impact of suboptimal levels of power and control on compensatory consumption (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Rucker, 2009; Ruvio & Dubois, 2012; Echo Wen, Vohs, et al., 2014). Given the prevalence of childhood experiences for members of this cluster, participants often referred to frustrations that entailed feeling constrained and lacking power, which they compensated for by engaging in conspicuous consumption via desiring to mark their independence and communicating their need for uniqueness. This latter point also demonstrates the ways in which different antecedents and triggers exerted a combined influence in initiating compensatory consumption, which confirms the proposition made in Chapter 2 and is a key contribution of this study. On the one hand, consumers did not necessarily engage in compensatory consumption unless there was an external stimulus, threat or trigger foregrounding their negative feelings and sparking a consumption cycle. On the other hand, once elicited by a trigger, the predisposition made people more susceptible to compensatory consumption pursuits.

The vast majority of compensatory consumption engagements in this group were motivated by a desire to reach the ideal consumer self. As demonstrated by the participants' reflections, a common theme concerned the great distance between their actual and ideal selves, which was frequently paired with a low level of self-acceptance. Individuals seemed to constantly strive for something better, wishing to improve themselves by introducing fundamental changes to their lifestyles and ways of being. They seemed to believe that once they reached their ideal state, for which material goods and consumption experiences were highly relevant, everything else would 'fall in place'. Linking back to earlier work on compulsive and addictive consumption, motivations tended to be personal in nature,

targeting psychological and emotional benefits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992), mood repair (Elliott et al., 1996) and personal appearance (Trautmann-Attmann & Johnson, 2009). Prior research also suggested that compulsive and addictive shoppers were often driven by a general aim to fill a void (Sohn & Choi, 2014; Spinella et al., 2014). The present work extends the existing literature of compensatory motivations by accentuating the relevance of uniqueness, independence, novelty and escape, and even the simple passing of time. Although some compensatory consumption instances were motivated by this notion of 'filling a void', most examples entailed at least some reference to the ideal consumer self as the overarching target.

During the acquisition stage, these consumers enjoyed the search for material goods during the pre-consumption period and had high expectations as to what they anticipated to gain following acquisition. At the same time, they did not seem to get much appreciation out of the products after having acquired them, as they recognised that the items did not help them close the gap between their actual and ideal selves. Furthermore, newly acquired possessions lost their novelty value fast, triggering new compensatory relapses. In this sense, the difference between past and future consumption was clearly prevalent, and individuals displayed more positive tendencies in relation to purchases that were desired and were anticipated to take place in the future as opposed to those that were already in their possession and happened in the past. In fact, consumers often exhibited a tendency of indifference regarding the product, and their whole endeavour was centred around the purchase itself and the desired emotional and psychological benefits (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992). Some exceptions were identified in the case of those possessions that provided continuous benefits over time, but as noted above were the exception rather than the rule.

The behaviours of these individuals were often erratic and unpredictable, characterised by impulsive and obsessive tendencies and extensive fluctuation between conscious and unconscious thinking. Given the substantial gap between their actual and ideal self-concepts, consumers' compensatory engagements did not result in need fulfilment, and instead often yielded new compensatory cycles, which is consistent with earlier work on addictive and compulsive consumption (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). The interviews revealed some contradictions that deviated from earlier propositions in the extant literature. In particular, some researchers posited that behaviours that started out as normal could often spiral into chronic forms and become incrementally disruptive to the individual's functioning (Horváth et al., 2013; Achtziger et al., 2015). In contrast, current evidence revealed that given their constant fluctuations between conscious and unconscious thought processes, consumers at least sometimes were able to stop potential compensatory engagements from occurring. In addition, although consumers frequently experienced felt guilt or shame when reflecting upon their compensatory behaviours, by engaging in post-purchase rationalisation, they were able to restore a more acceptable self-view and reposition their perception of the experience as non-disruptive. Finally, during those times when they were able to approximate their ideal selves, like when they lost weight or had a

major accomplishment, they were able to refrain from their otherwise predominantly negative compensatory tendencies.

Nonetheless, the post-acquisition stage entailed largely negative and disruptive consequences for these consumers, including follow-up rationalisation, justification, and frequent instances of guilt and remorse, with limited short-term mood repair. It is important to note that participants did not experience major economic hardship, which again was most likely due to their relatively affluent financial situation. It is unclear what the situation would be in the case of more disadvantaged populations, which is an area that should be pursued in subsequent work.

5-B.2. Consumer cluster 2: Aspirational non-conformists

The second group, the aspirational non-conformists, included Fanny, Fay and Helena. Members of this cluster continued to project some level of discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves but were less affected by this incongruence in their daily existence. These consumers had a greater extent of self-acceptance and a generally healthier view of themselves in comparison to the first group, decreasing the gap between their actual and ideal selves substantially from the first cluster. Their stories projected an interesting history and evolution regarding their consumer identity. In particular, they all identified a certain event or period in their past – connected to having children, moving to a new house or country, going through a divorce, or recognising certain unwanted behavioural patterns that encouraged them to reassess their priorities and shift their consumption towards more desirable and sustainable forms. They consciously moved away from more compensatory and compulsive tendencies during their younger years to embrace less compensatory forms of consumption. This is consistent with earlier work positing that certain lifecourse transitions – such as motherhood or retirement – can serve as opportunities to adapt more sustainable forms of consumption (Burningham & Venn, 2017). In some stories, participants went as far as to portray themselves as non-consumers, viewing compensatory consumption in a highly negative light, as something to be avoided.

Members of this group followed contemporary trends and were heavily motivated by achieving an aspirational consumer identity that set them apart from the mainstream, taking pride of being recognised as unique and distinctive. Their behaviours still represented compensatory patterns, but with different motivations and qualitatively different forms when compared with the first group. In addition to pursuing contemporary consumer trends, they also cared about sustainability and environmental concerns. They tried to minimise their consumption and concentrate on items that carried meaning. Members of this group voiced a strong dislike for large shopping centres and preferred to shop online or in small unique settings. Reasons for this seemed to be two-fold. From a symbolic point of view, shopping centres for these participants represented mainstream consumer society which these participants took a vocal stand against. From a sensory overload perspective, they found shopping centres overwhelming and difficult to bear.

On occasion, they expressed elements of impulse but were trying to minimise these occurrences as they took pride in being conscious and thoughtful consumers. Their social environment served as a feedback mechanism, enabling them to remain in touch with new trends. These participants were able to account for most of their possessions and were highly organised and structured in their consumption. Having a clean space and a positive environment were important for them, and they appreciated positive feedback from their social circle. Many of their possessions had a unique story which they proudly shared with others.

In comparison to the first group, compensatory engagements for members of this cluster were substantially less prevalent and manifested themselves in a qualitatively different fashion. Rather than perpetually chasing a different consumer self via addictive, obsessive and sometimes compulsive tendencies, participants in the current cluster were more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption and pursue unique items with a special story.

5-B.2.a. Pre-acquisition stage

Predispositions

During the period preceding acquisition, the most relevant predisposition for members of this group concerned the particular event or time period earlier on in their life that initiated a substantial change in the way they consumed and approached material goods. As part of this change, they started to follow certain key trends that made sense for them in their pursuit of an aspirational consumer identity. They seemed to carefully select items that were either unique in some way and hence fit with their aspirational identity project or had an interesting enough story to make them worthwhile to keep. Important trends involved decluttering, sustainability and need for uniqueness, acting as complementary rather than separate forces.

Consumer history was pivotal for these consumers, representing a before and after situation regarding their consumption. In the case of Fay, she linked the change with the period of her divorce and familiarisation with mindfulness, which made her more aware of her own behaviour and initiated substantial changes to move towards embracing non-consumerist tendencies.

“So when I was married, and before my divorce, so these two benchmarks, and before my practice of mindfulness and when I was married, also when I didn't practice mindfulness. I think it was, I went shopping to feel better. Like many people, especially many women do. This kind of therapy, to feel worthy, or have a boost. But on the other hand, I sometimes felt guilty about spending, because I wasn't the major breadwinner, my husband was. So this was like a double kind of a thing. So I don't, I didn't really analyse that, but I think about all the psychological triggers why I did that, and even after the divorce, I think... So after the separation and divorce, and I think before mindfulness, before I practiced mindfulness and I had that inner source of how to feel good, like rather than get it from outside. And I manage my emotions in different ways. So I would go shopping again, because I felt like, oh, I deserve it, to feel better, to look better, and there is nothing wrong with that. But now, you know, I'm just more conscious of my, of shopping, of what I purchase.” (Fay)

Fay's quote clearly identifies her shift, moving from her past where her shopping was highly compensatory addressing various lacks in her life, to her current behaviours where she was able to overcome her previous insecurities and was more conscious about her consumption behaviour. She

attributed her success achieving this shift to her ability to practice mindful self-compassion, enabling her to identify inner rather than external sources of positivity. Fay also noted that beyond her more conscious and sustainable tendencies, her taste also evolved, exerting a further impact on her choice and aspirational consumer identity.

“I've been in guided tours of contemporary art in Paris recently, and my taste has evolved, you know, I have some sentimental attachment to some of my long-time possessions, but not as much otherwise I would store them somewhere in the cellar, if I had something better to replace, like a contemporary bright colours. I like bright colours more now. [...] I appreciate how these new trends are, the design, the art, it makes sense what they are saying. So I wouldn't mind changing. [...] And I like to clean things out, purify. I have some items, like there is this one jacket I've had, I don't know, maybe 20 years, but because it's not out of fashion, I can still wear it. I bought it in Italy, but it's not, it's not typical. It's unique. Because I do get tired of things. And I like to turn over. Because when I give away, then I clean space, and then I want new things” (Fay)

Helena linked her change to a combination of different factors. She mentioned throughout her interview becoming more aware, having to adopt a more frugal style given their recurrent real estate projects, having to downsize because of frequent moves, and generally wanting to pursue things that mattered and added value to her life. She talked about wanting to be more conscious and to only pursue things that she needed and would enjoy.

“Over the years I became more conscious. It changed over time. I always liked to, it's interesting. When I was pregnant, many times I noticed that that was a period when you were bored, and you would go shopping. But then it changed. And my kids, I raised them so that they know that we don't buy stupid things. [...] In terms of clothing, it happens a lot that I look at things, that I was serious about this? So there was a big change. When we moved, I was forced to go through a lot of clothes. But at least half of it. And now, my plan was that all our clothes can fit in one, and we don't need the switch between summer and winter clothing. And I was looking at my clothes, and I saw that everything is good as is. A few things were missing, I can replace those, but there is nothing really. So now even in clothing it's quite set. [...] The constructions and needing to always be careful with expenses, it also teaches you to adopt a very series financial behaviour that I feel is now a part of me.” (Helena)

She mentioned a few months period during which she was living in England, referring to her context as highly materialistic. She admitted to being exposed to a lot of things that seemed interesting for a while, but then became tiresome and uninteresting. She also mentioned an old habit of shopping in second-hand stores, something she has been trying to move away from to concentrate on new things. At the same time, she made an interesting reference to how it's all just a ‘game’, suggesting that her satisfaction was not going to be guaranteed simply because she was paying more money for a particular item.

“Well, I used to shop a lot in England. But I had a good salary, and it was quite a material world anyway. And I also followed, I bought a lot of things. But I think that for a while it's interesting, but then after a while it doesn't motivate me that I have one thing more. You think it will be good, but then you realise that it's actually not the case. I think that's it. [...] To this day, I am able to buy things in used clothing stores some items, some are actually my favourite. Now I try to concentrate on things that are new, but I still sometimes go to these stores. But that's, I think it's a passion, and I also know that it's only a game. And I am not willing to spend so much money on things. Because I know that if I were to buy the same piece of clothing 100 euros in some other stores, it would still mean the same, I would either like it or not, or wear it or not, so it would be the same.” (Helena)

In her story, Fanny reflected upon a particular period of time that represented a substantial turning point for her, on the one hand being pregnant with her second child and on the other hand relocating from her hometown to a new cultural setting. She recognised that in the past she frequently made purchases that were impulsive, and she has been working hard to shift away from this and to embrace

a more conscious and need-based consumption style. It is important to note that in comparison to Fay and Helena, Fanny seemed to be at an earlier stage of her developmental trajectory as a consumer, which permeated throughout her stories. She also talked at length about what she used to be like before the move and her change.

“OK, there were. You will think really low of me after this interview. There was a new concealer, it was all the hype, it was only available in the States. So I asked my father to call his friend, to have his address, a 60 year-old man, and have my concealer shipped to him. He is in Los Angeles. You know, because he comes here all the time, to Turkey. All the time. So I had the concealer shipped to his office, so and they were at a conference, and they were off that week, so the package went to his home instead. And the wife of the man found the box, and she thought he was cheating on him. And so she threw it away. And then my father asked me about it, and they reordered it, it was a second time around he received the package. It took us 3 months to get it. But instead of waiting for someone to go to the States and come back, I got obsessed, and I had to have it now. But I stopped that. I stopped being so obsessed now.” (Fanny)

This above story clearly indicates impulsive tendencies bordering obsession. At the same time, Fanny seemed to be able to discuss these experiences in an objective fashion and referred to her strong desire to change on multiple occasions. Furthermore, her subsequent quotes and stories represented a substantial development that has taken place already, although she was committed to continuing her evolution.

“And nowadays I can notice a major change. I'm no longer an impulse buyer I believe, I don't know. Generally not. Sometimes yes, but generally not. I'm trying to be, now, more what do you call it, more considerate. And reduce my expenses... Spending. Yes, so I need to ask, no, I started to ask myself, do I really need it, can I reuse something on purpose, something. etc etc. I used to do a lot of needless shopping, especially makeup. I stopped that. Because, that was back in Turkey. I used to buy whatever. If there was a hype on the product, I would buy that. Hype I mean it was popular. I was part of this community, the makeup community, they had spring releases, Xmas releases, they would have these hypes around the product, then I would buy it. [...] I would buy 3 different colours of something I would like. So now I say, OK, you can always find some next time, and if not, too bad. Now I wouldn't do that.” (Fanny)

Overall, it seems that in each case there was an important event or time period that initiated a shift in the consumers' style that in turn made them become more conscious and aware of their consumption. They not only moved away from compensatory consumption which they viewed as negative, but they also adamantly embraced non-consumerist tendencies. This is important as it confirms that the consumer history of individuals often reveals certain aspects that are critical to understand current choices and preferences. This point holds further ramifications to inform contemporary consumer research and will be elaborated upon to a greater extent in Chapter 7.

Triggers

Given their careful planning preceding consumption engagements, triggers were not very prevalent for members of this group. Although some of their consumption was compensatory in that it was driven by an aspirational identity, it operated more in the background and did not have a recurrent impact on their everyday behaviours. Instead, compromise was a more dominant driver underpinning their consumption engagements that will receive further attention in Chapter 6.

Motivations

Similarly to triggers, motivations were more relevant in compromisory rather than compensatory engagements for members of this cluster, and hence will be discussed in Chapter 6 in greater detail.

5-B.2.b. Acquisition stage

Consumption in the case of this group was important only as far as they could find ways to pursue certain key aspirations. Whenever they thought about buying something, consumers tried to make sure it was for the right reasons and in pursuit of the right products. They avoided large spaces, preferred online outlets or small venues, and generally aimed at pursuing unique items with a special story that in turn would help them approximate their aspirational identities. As will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 6, instead of engaging in predominantly compensatory behaviours, these consumers fit the overall premise of consumer-driven compromise, capturing conspicuous and occasionally impulsive tendencies. Importantly, the behaviours of these consumers were largely self-contained, and no longer represented any cyclical pattern; in turn demonstrating an important departure from the first cluster.

5-B.2.c. Post-acquisition stage

Given that these participants were generally content with themselves, it does not make sense to talk about the post-acquisition stage at length either. As an interesting point, however, aspirational non-conformists presented the only group that talked about returning purchases, and they also were highly reflective about their newly acquired possessions to evaluate them in light of their personal value.

5-B.2.d. Summary

Consumers in the second cluster were substantially more content with their lives and had a higher degree of self-acceptance when compared to the first group. Their ideal and actual selves were closer to one another, and instead of compensation these consumers tended to engage in compromisory behaviours. The only relevant point for the purposes of compensatory compensation concerned their consumer history, whereby they moved from a heavily compensatory past towards a non-consumerist presence, where compromise began to play a more dominant role. Further details on this will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

Summarising the above observations, Table 5.2 showcases the details for the compensatory consumption process associated with the participants of the current group.

TABLE 5.2 Compensatory consumption process in cluster 2: The aspirational non-conformists.

	Fanny	Fay	Helena
P R E A C Q U I S I T I O N	Predisposition	Consumer history – breaking away from compensatory tendencies	Consumer history- breaking away from compensatory tendencies
	Trigger	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Motivation	Approximation of aspirational self	Approximation of aspirational self
Acquisition	Unique items with a special story Conspicuous consumption	Unique items with a special story Conspicuous consumption Impulsive purchases	Unique items with a special story Conspicuous consumption
Post-acquisition	Not applicable Returns	Not applicable Returns	Not applicable Returns

In contrast with the first cluster of unhappy idealists, members of the present group were not subjected to enduring insecurities, had a substantially smaller gap between their ideal and actual selves, and demonstrated a higher degree of self-acceptance. They identified a clear distinction in their history to separate their prior and current consumption practices, reflecting upon an earlier period in their lives when mainstream influences and patterns were more prevalent in their consumption. They felt they managed to overcome these to a large extent and were committed to approximating an aspirational consumer identity that they viewed as superior to the heavily consumption-focused society. Participants in this cluster followed relevant consumer trends, cared about sustainability, longevity, clean space and decluttering, and were determined to reduce their consumption to concentrate on specific needs. They were highly conscious about their consumption and took pride in going against materialistic societal trends. In comparison to the first group of consumers for whom antecedents and triggers in combination exerted the greatest influence on initiating compensatory consumption, the same was no longer the case for this cluster, given their conscious deliberations that reduced the prevalence of triggers.

Furthermore, consumption here was more likely to result in at least partial satisfaction of actual or perceived needs and wants, yielding to less frequent relapses and cycles. Nonetheless, some of their consumption remained compensatory driven by their perpetual pursuit of an aspirational self. Although participants in the second cluster wished to portray elements of trend-seeking and non-consumption in their overall style, their constant reflections about their behaviours and possessions nonetheless signalled conspicuous and occasionally impulsive tendencies. These findings are in line with earlier research on impulsive and conspicuous consumption. More specifically, the behaviours of these consumers entailed a cognitive component that elevated them to a level that was within their control (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Key motivations were linked with the attainment of higher order needs (Hausman, 2000) and achieving social standing and prestige (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010), which in this case came from following and embracing relevant consumer trends. Furthermore, the pursued product or service achieved a position of central importance, with the focus shifting from acquisition to usage, showcasing and social display, and ultimately loyalty and attachment (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Chaudhuri et al., 2011). What is particularly interesting here is the strong dominance of consumer trends, which has not yet been connected to compensatory and compromise consumption in earlier work. As will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, these behaviours may be more closely aligned with consumer-driven compromise rather than mere compensation.

5-B.3. Consumer cluster 3: Mental modelists

The third group of consumers, the mental modelists, included Holly, Fatima, Francesca, Francine, Peter and Phoebe; capturing members who planned much of their consumption with care and appeared relatively rational and pragmatic in their decisions. These individuals were generally content with life and were largely self-accepting, envisioning potential life improvements that were not disruptive to their daily functioning and were also not linked directly to their perceived self-worth. Consumption for

them was a natural part of everyday life, and they were quite reflective about their own behaviours. They did not seek unattainable desires, and their compensatory engagements tended to be driven by easily justifiable needs or occasional frustrations that were transient and temporary in duration. These consumers valued predictability; while they were somewhat open to experimenting with novel consumer goods or experiences, they did so in small increments, in order to remain in control and minimise follow-up disappointment or regret. Certain consistent insecurities surfaced that led to occasional impulsive and conspicuous tendencies, but these were less severe and less persistent, and were often attributable to contextual cues and external sources such as peer pressure. When they occurred, consumers tended to develop and maintain techniques, cognitive shortcuts or in a sense mental models to assist their consumption and to maximise their satisfaction. Overall, they did not overthink their purchases, largely diminishing the prevalence of the post-acquisition stage.

Although many participants admitted that they did not think about their consumption habits too much on a day-to-day basis, they enjoyed talking about their stories and also seemed at ease with the picture they painted of themselves. This is in striking contrast with the situation of the first group, who felt uneasy about their own consumer image and, for instance, tried to deny or justify any irrational connotations. Mental modelists were quite aware of occasional insecurities, were often able to verbalise them, and took steps to develop adequate coping mechanisms. They applied certain decision shortcuts and mental models to guide their behaviour, which they occasionally reviewed and revised, especially in the case of suboptimal outcomes. These were particularly the case when they caught themselves engaging in impulsive behaviours which they tried to avoid. Fatima, for instance, decided not to shop when in the company of her friends, as in these instances she found herself more susceptible to impulsive behaviours that in turn led to suboptimal purchases and follow-up regret. In this sense, prior experiences and mistakes were used to inform future decisions and enhance consumer learning. Given that these consumers were quite consistent in their consumption throughout their life course, improvements were relatively minor and attainable, aiming at to simplify consumption while maximising consumer satisfaction.

5-B.3.a. Pre-acquisition stage

Predispositions

In comparison to previous groups, predispositions to compensatory consumption became increasingly transient and contextual as opposed to being enduring and personal. In their stories, consumers revealed some insecurities, but the majority of these seemed temporary, often due to experiencing a period of professional transition that exerted constraints over consumption. Some individuals revealed issues with lack of confidence, work-related frustrations and temporary constraints that limited their purchasing power or comfort, which in turn resulted in some compensatory engagements. Fatima's quote below provides an example for this.

“I went in and there were a few different types, styles that I saw before, and so I was not sure which ones, I tried two or three different, and as it was raining it was, it felt strange on my feet. There is thing as well, I, it's hard for me to choose. It's a trait of my personality. There are two things that's worse, that's hell for me. So I wasted time, I always, I didn't start to think about the point of you who are selling, like the person who is here for 20 minutes, so bad! Sometimes I take them just because I feel bad! At the same time, because I, I look stupid, because I'm just there, I can't decide.” (Fatima)

In her story, Fatima admitted her frustration with feeling uneasy in situations when she felt unable to make a decision, and in order to compensate for ‘wasting’ the sales staff’s time and to avoid ‘looking stupid’, she often ended up ‘rushing into’ a purchase.

Triggers

Consumers identified certain triggers that initiated subsequent compensatory behaviours, but in a way that was quite different from the experiences of consumers in the previous two clusters. Importantly, triggers that initiated compensatory consumption included transient and situational emotional discomfort as opposed to long-standing discontent and persistent emotional pain. In this sense, behaviours became less pre-disposed to compensatory consumption and were more driven by contextual cues and compromisory tendencies, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. These consumers often acted upon the combination of a primary trigger of actual need with secondary triggers like mood, achievement or an external cue that ultimately initiated the compensatory consumption. Hence, although examples to demonstrate each trigger will be reviewed separately, it is important to recognise that in most cases they operated in collaboration with one another.

Recognising the undesirable consequences of impulse buying, many consumers reported adopting strategies like staying away from sales, not shopping in the presence of friends, or keeping an aspirational list on their phones. At the same time, these consumers were still prone to compensatory shopping in response to contextual triggers and transient emotional states, as demonstrated by Fatima’s quote.

“A few weeks ago when I was not feeling that good, and it was sunny outside, and I just received some money on my account, and I was like OK, I will get the shoes. I scratched them from the list, and now I'm ready for some sun.” (Fatima)

In Fatima’s case, *being sad* or feeling down, in combination with the nice weather outside, served as a trigger to initiate her compensatory consumption. In particular, Fatima kept a list of aspirational purchases, and when ‘the time was right’ (i.e. she was sad, had a negative experience at work, or was fed up with the weather), she would go ahead and pursue an item and cross it off her list. Compensation shifted from the earlier two clusters to provide a small emotional boost rather than address a deep personal gap.

Pre-commitment to making a purchase and not wanting to waste time also surfaced as important factors. For instance, Phoebe shared a specific encounter when she went shopping in the hope to buying something for herself, but as she could not find what she was looking for, she got frustrated and ended up buying something for her children; helping her justify that her time spent would not all go to waste.

In this sense, Phoebe was frustrated with having spent too much time without success, for which she compensated by making an alternative and unplanned purchase for someone else.

Motivations

The most prominent motivation underlying compensatory consumption in this group concerned elements of reward and deservedness. Despite their generally rational and calculating approach to consumption, consumers were happy to reflect upon instances when they rewarded themselves for a particular accomplishment like a successful interview or following an intensive study period. Fatima mentioned going out and spending time with her friends on occasion, in order to socialise and reward themselves for working hard throughout the rest of the month. As reflected in her quote, Francine also talked about rewarding herself with a Starbucks treat and some new CDs after having passed an exam.

“The answer is always Starbucks. When I'm happy, you know, I self-gift. When I'm sad, I need it. It's always the same, the answer is the same. it's soothing.” (Francine)

Phoebe's quote below adds an additional interesting layer to her rewarding activity.

“After the interview, for instance, I felt really happy. But it could be other times too. When something good happens. And what do I do? It could be anything. I can get into the first store, can get more relaxed, I can get relaxed and buy something that I perhaps may not even need. Or perhaps I eat some dessert where in other circumstances I may be stricter with myself and I wouldn't otherwise do. Like after the interview turned out well, and so I felt let's go and shop. But then it doesn't really matter what I buy, it's the experience of the buying process itself, not necessarily the product. So it's not very specific, it's more the general experience of shopping.” (Phoebe)

Similarly to Fatima and Francine, reward for Phoebe entailed doing something out of the ordinary, where she was able to feel more relaxed, buy something she may not need, or do something – such as eating a dessert – that she otherwise would not do. Importantly, her quote accentuates the experiential nature of the activity, shifting the emphasis away from the item towards the experience. In his own story, Peter also talked about the importance of spending time with his friends, which was special and relatively scarce, considering that the vast majority of his social circle lived in different countries. Whenever he was able to meet up with them, he felt relaxed and was happy to expand resources above and beyond his general comportments.

5-B.3.b. Acquisition stage

Members in this cluster seemed highly rational and pragmatic in their approach to their purchases. The act of consumption did not seem to embody a central importance in their lives, which at least in part may explain why some of them experienced initial difficulty coming up with elaborate consumer stories. Only a few purchases ended up in their possession without being subjected to rather extensive prior contemplation. They could account for most things they owned, and each consumption act registered for them as an independent event. Although some of their consumption was compensatory in nature, they were driven predominantly by contextual cues like weather and mood or a positive or negative event, which were more prevalent in the pre-acquisition rather than the acquisition stage.

5-B.3.c. Post-acquisition stage

In most cases, consumers were content with their purchase and did not experience any follow-up guilt or regret. While consumption for these participants was quite reasonable and predominantly driven by actual need, they also seemed comfortable accepting that sometimes they may not behave in a fully rational manner. Their consumption history seemed relevant for them as a source of learning, with particular attention to trying to minimize or fully avoid compensatory or impulsive comportments. Importantly, these consumers were able to reflect upon their rewarding experiences with elements of joy and satisfaction, without guilt or remorse, making the post-acquisition stage a generally positive – and largely untemplated – experience for them.

5-B.3.d. Summary

Several relevant conclusions can be drawn based on the above quotes and information pertaining to the third group of mental modelists. Importantly, the comparatively greater extent of actual / ideal self-congruence and self-acceptance resulted in several positive consequences for participants. Despite the occasional signs of conspicuous tendencies, material goods and services were increasingly appreciated for the value they brought rather than the social feedback and gratification they solicited from the outside world. Experiences enabled consumers to develop mental models that they could rely on to simplify aspects of their lives, including their consumption. As apparent from the above section, consumption-related decisions seemed to operate on a more conscious level, which also contributed to the greater sense of control, willingness to share, and lack of guilt, regret and remorse showcased by these participants. Consequently, the majority of consumption in this cluster was utility-optimising and compromisory rather than compensatory, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Table 5.3 provides an overview to capture the compensatory consumption process in the case of participants in the current group.

TABLE 5.3 Compensatory consumption process in cluster 3: The mental modelists.

	Holly	Fatima	Francesca	Francine	Peter	Phoebe
P R E A C Q U I S I T I O N	Predisposition	Low decision-making ability	Temporary unemployment Unfitting fashion style	Financial insecurity Career uncertainty	Limited social engagements Misfit with class society	Lack of employment Exposure to new cultures
	Trigger	Actual need Negative mood Contextual cues	Actual need Positive or negative events Seasonal change	Actual need Social outing Celebration	Actual need Social outing	Actual need Mood Pre-commitment
	Motivation	Satisfaction Reward Avoid impulsive tendencies	More ease with consumption	Socialisation Reward Fun & enjoyment	Experimentation Maximise return on investment	Reward Deservedness Not waste time
Acquisition	Independent events	Independent events Experiential consumption	Independent events	Independent events Experiential consumption	Independent events Experiential consumption	Independent events
Post-acquisition	Consumer learning	Adaptation Consumer learning	Adaptation Celebration	Joy & happiness	Consumer learning	Consumer learning

In summary, compensatory engagements for members of this group were less prevalent and were often preceded by temporary states like being a student, experiencing temporary lack of employment, or living in a different culture from the participant's own. Some personal insecurities such as lack of confidence or low decision-making ability emerged, but consumers were aware of these attributes and were trying to identify ways of remedy. Triggers tended to concentrate on temporary contextual cues like nice weather or social outings, or transient emotional states brought upon by positive or negative events. The key motivation underlying compensatory engagements were linked with reward, maximising satisfaction and minimising follow-up regret. Purchases were independent events and focused on appreciation and experiential pursuits. Consumption events were contemplated to ensure adaptation and consumer learning, although follow-up regret and remorse were scarce.

5-B.4. Consumer cluster 4: Happy experientialists

The fourth and final consumer cluster, the happy experientialists, included Fiona, Florence, Hugo and Pedro. Members of this group revealed an interesting dichotomy in their consumption. Generally speaking, these participants were highly content with themselves and were also highly self-accepting, not showing evidence of a desired aspirational future ideal. Compensatory consumption for them appeared sporadically, when facing certain time periods or situations. Interestingly, during these specific times, participants were prone to engage in behaviours that seemed highly compensatory, showcasing incidents of impulse and even extreme comportments. At the same time, consumers were happy to own up to these behaviours, and demonstrated no follow-up remorse or regret. Considering their otherwise controlled and responsible demeanours, compensatory engagements in the case of these individuals seemed to represent a form of escape and distraction. Importantly, members of this group pursued consumption experiences almost exclusively for the experiential value of the process, placing little emphasis on material possessions as well as subsequent social feedback or confirmation.

5-B.4.a. Pre-acquisition stage

Pre-dispositions

Antecedents in general were not very prevalent for this group, especially in comparison with the previous consumer clusters. Although members of this group were rather diverse in terms of their backgrounds, professional orientations and consumption interests, they had a relatively light outlook on life and did not exhibit enduring insecurities. Consequently, their actual and ideal selves were highly congruent, they portrayed high levels of self-acceptance, and importantly were happy to own up to their occasionally impulsive or compulsive behaviours. This is in large contrast with the situation of the first cluster, whose members – when faced with such discrepancy – began to emphasise their rational demeanour and engaged in extensive follow-up justification while telling their story.

As a common theme, all participants in this cluster led a highly controlled life and were regularly exposed to a fair amount of external pressure, which required them to be highly organised and

professional. In the case of Fiona this meant traveling most of the time for her work, flying around the world covering important sporting events. Florence was a freelancer with a busy and dynamic teaching portfolio, which required her to be structured and remain in control of her schedule, while also making sure to secure sufficient funds by the end of each month to sustain her life. Hugo, being a divorced father and sharing responsibility of the three children with his ex-wife, constantly found himself in the midst of logistical planning and organisation to suit the needs of different family members, while also trying to keep up with his job-related requirements. Finally, Pedro, being a top manager at his firm placed him in a high-stress environment with a lot of responsibility, long hours, limited control, and little time with his family, experienced recurrent stress and frustrations, along with extensive organisational and logistical demands. This shared predisposition will become relevant when considering compensatory motivations, as we will find that the two factors together will play an important role in initiating compensatory engagements.

Triggers

Similarly to the case of predispositions, triggers did not seem very prevalent for members of this group, and many participants openly admitted to not needing a reason to shop. When prompted to further contemplate this point, some participants identified a few triggers that sparked the onset of some of their consumption activities; although even in these instances, participants tended to reiterate to the lack of need for a reason to shop. Fiona's quote presents a good example.

"If it's sunny it's better. Like if the sun is shining, ok, let's go for a run. But if it's raining, well, I'm going to go shopping under the rain it's not good. So yeah, the weather plays a part. Also if you like have a party the week after, or if you want to go to a restaurant or something. That's more like this. Or sometime when you are bored. Like OK, what am I going to do today, let's go shopping. That's all. Or you saw something on TV on someone or you see a magazine, and you think 'oh, that looks nice', and then you think... of course that looks nice on *her*, doesn't mean it will look nice on you, but let's see... I think, like it's getting cold, so I'm like I'm going to have to shop because my former stuff is not... Because when I need it, I shop, also when I have time. Like, I walk a lot, I like walking, I like, just go and see shops... I don't need a reason to shop, which is ... bad [laughing]. Just go and have a look... in Gallery Lafayette in the bag section. Just to have a look... I don't think I need a reason. Yeah, you know, you earned enough money, you worked hard, you deserve something so let's go. When it's more expensive, it's more like ok you treat yourself because you feel you deserve it, or you find a good reason. No, I don't need a reason to shop. I think when you live in Paris, you don't really feel like you need a reason to shop. I have time, let's go out, it's a good week." (Fiona)

As demonstrated by Fiona's quote, triggers for compensatory consumption were predominantly due to external and contextual cues rather than internal factors. Along these lines, Hugo's stories did not emphasise triggers either, although he shared an interesting point while reflecting upon his behaviours that – as he explained – alternated between periods of austerity and extensive spending. He talked about not consuming anything for a long period of time, and then once the spending pressure built up, he had enough of the austerity and 'went nuts'. He seems to have chosen consumption as an outlet in which to lose himself and in turn compensate for the austerity and external controls in his life.

"With me, it's really not having gone shopping for a long time. Suddenly I'm like, I want to go shopping. Like I hold back on buying and then I let it all out once the pressure has grown too big and then I really spend a lot. You know, the spending pressure. The wanting pressure. It could be anything. I just enjoy spending money, it's

fun. Yeah. Kitchen stuff, clothes, like anything. But I can like not spend for a long long time, but then I've had enough of the austerity and then I go nuts.” (Hugo)

These observations echo the case of Hannah from the first group, who also admitted feeling the urge to buy something after a ‘long enough’ period of non-consumption. In Hugo’s case, however, cyclical consumption periods were not only related to shopping for clothing and material goods, but also prevailed in other sorts of consumption experiences. For instance, Hugo discussed staying away completely from any alcohol during several years, but then resumed – even in rather excessive amounts – during some periods. This indicates that the ‘pressure’ he felt may not be restricted to material goods but may be relevant in other experiential outlets as well.

Traveling was mentioned as a recurrent theme throughout the consumer stories, with several participants planning their purchases for when they travelled. Some of these encounters were driven by limited supplies in their home base, which will be an important point during the later discussions in Chapter 6 concerning compromisory encounters. Florence, for instance, talked about shopping for certain items in the US where a wider range of goods were available for her. Her quote also presents a nice illustration to blend conscious need with impulsive tendencies.

“When I’m back home in the US, I love to go for one or two days, for clothes especially, for one or two days, like for four hours and just do it. You know, I look around in stores in the States, get a bathing suit, get black pants, get a few tops, get a work outfit, get a party outfit, and then go home and say that's it for the next year. That's how I like to shop. [...] I always feel excited when I go to the mall in Florida. When my dad drops me off and I have three hours. And I have my budget, I have my budget of 2 or 3 hundred euros, perhaps a little more, and I have three hours, and that's it.” (Florence)

For Florence, shopping while traveling was also relevant in other ways, being linked with having more time and interest while on a trip. Focusing her shopping and concentrating them during trips seemed to serve as a justification for spending money despite her limited resources, and a compensation for her otherwise restrictive means and controlled everyday life.

Motivations

As mentioned above, a recurrent theme for participants in the fourth cluster came from their shared reality of operating within highly controlled settings that necessitated extensive organisation and planning. In large part to compensate for these environments and external stressors, participants often turned to consumer experiences to seek a form of *escape* and distraction, enabling them to break away from their daily chores. Each participant seemed to have found certain activities that enabled them to disengage from their day-to-day encounters, relax and appreciate the particular experience in its own right.

In particular, Fiona talked about the joy of being able to do causal shopping in her Parisian home base – often for items she would not ultimately end up using or could not even wear; Florence engaged in consumption splurges during holidays or while spending time with others; Hugo went on shopping sprees for everything and anything mostly to spend time with his daughter; and Pedro escaped to the

comforting world of wine collections and holiday planning when faced with too much stress at work. In these instances, consumers enjoyed the chosen compensatory experience, losing themselves in the respective engagement while escaping from their daily controlled environments.

Seeking escape, distraction, and sheer enjoyment, consumers in this cluster did not seem overly interested in product ownership. Fiona, for instance, talked about wanting brands essentially for the sake of wanting them, recognising that some of her pursued possessions she would never actually use.

“Bags I get Louis Vuitton is fantastic. I have the dream of one day buying me a Givenchy, but they are so expensive it is ridiculous. So maybe I am going to go crazy one time and buy one. The shoes, new balance because the sneakers are fantastic. When you live in Paris, all the streets that you go to have really pretty brands. And then like, all brands that you are never going to put on you but you want it. It’s ridiculous.” (Fiona)

Pedro spoke at length about the personal gratification he received from planning vacations with his family. His story presented an interesting example relevant for triggers as well as motivations, which further confirms the interrelatedness of different forces operating in combination to influence compensatory consumption.

“Well, traveling. I like to plan it just because then I look forward to it. And when you plan you kind of look at the places, think how it will be like to be there, you kind of anticipate the pleasure of the trip. And. You know, it kind of puts you in the holiday mode. So I actually like to plan. I mean not everything, sometimes it's a pain, but I usually I like the planning. [...] Oh man. After we finished another trip. Kind of, you know, getting back to work is always tough, and kind planning another trip and seeing another trip at the end of the tunnel kind of makes the process easier. That was it. So I just get back from holidays, start thinking where we'll go next, check some options.” (Pedro)

The additional detail concerning the timing cycle was particularly interesting. Pedro admitted to starting the planning for the next vacation immediately after finishing the previous one. When he returned to the office, and realised that vacation was over (trigger), he seemed to appreciate the ‘escape’ brought upon by the planning of his next holiday and the anticipation of the associated pleasantries (motivation). This again shows – as in many of the earlier accounts from other groups – that treating individual triggers and motivations that play a part throughout the compensatory consumption process in isolation is overly simplistic, as it overlooks the comprehensive and complex nature of many compensatory consumption engagements.

5-B.4.b. Acquisition stage

In contrast to previous groups where the consumption process often presented an element of stress for participants, members of this cluster clearly enjoyed their consumer encounters and often pursued them for their own sake.

“I mean otherwise I don't really care that much about stuff. It's more like the buying that's the fun part. Having stuff, not so much.” (Hugo)

Hugo’s quote demonstrates that participants tended to focus their attention on the process of acquisition and experience rather than ownership. Driven by the motivation of escape, consumers often pursued compensatory encounters that entailed socialising with others, doing things out of the ordinary, and letting themselves relax. In this sense, members of this group were after the sharing, reward, gifting,

and anticipation that the consumption process and engagement entailed, and did not focus on the material goods themselves. Importantly, they experienced no regret or remorse when describing their stories, even if they contained impulsive or irrational elements.

5-B.4.c. Post-acquisition stage

Following up on the previous section, participants in this group seemed to give less importance to the ownership of material possessions, and once they made a purchase, they did not spend much time or energy on further reflection. They enjoyed the process and the consumption activity which for them did not entail follow-up consequences, at least not in the negative sense. When reflecting upon their purchases, they tended to do so with joy and appreciation, being happy to think back to and recounting the experience. Florence provides a good example for this, emphasising her lack of attachment to material goods.

“When I buy something like cheese or wine, I just enjoy it, I never regret. And other things too... I’m happy with them. Stuff is just not that important. A few things are. You know, OMG, if I lost these earrings, I would be really sad. If I lost these two rings, I would be really sad. Certain scarfs I really am attached to. Other ones I have and I never wear any more. I’m not attached to a lot. I’m not really attached to stuff.” (Florence)

There were mentions that could be considered as justification, like Florence ‘allowing herself to shop’ or desiring to embrace a ‘live and let live’ type of approach to her life, but these comments were more driven by the conversation during the interview, and did not present any doubt or sense of discomfort for participants. This was in contrast with the experience of members in earlier groups, who felt uncomfortable when presented with the reality of their own compensatory behaviours, and thus tried to compensate by emphasising their own rationality or finding other forms of justification.

Furthermore, members of this group actually seemed to have achieved satisfaction through their consumption, which will be a relevant point for the discussion on compromise in Chapter 6. Interestingly, these participants seemed to be able to separate the actual experience that was perceived as enjoyable from the follow-up assessment of the product. Given their strong focus on the experience itself, they were not as harsh on the products, and did not experience much remorse or regret even when faced with a less than optimal consumption engagement. In this sense, the consumption experience enabled them to achieve need satisfaction, which was derived not necessarily from the product or service but from the experience itself. These points will be further explored in Chapter 6 in the section devoted to compromise.

5-B.4.d. Summary

The final group of participants represented compensatory consumption practices that were quite interesting and somewhat surprising. In comparison to the other three groups, these consumers were the most self-accepting and most content with themselves overall. The majority of the time they seemed quite conscious, rational and realistic about their consumption, and did not signal any discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves. The interesting twist came from their sporadic behaviours where

they exhibited highly impulsive – sometimes even compulsive – tendencies, which defied their otherwise careful and controlled comportments. They appeared at ease to discuss these events, without any reluctance or sense of shame. These engagements often concentrated on specific material or experiential domains and occurred in particular times and contextual settings. Regarding the post-consumption stage, most participants seemed highly indifferent about the ownership and use of their newly acquired possessions. Even when faced with instances when they may have been acting on impulse, they remained self-accepting and engaged in practically no follow-up rationalisation or justification.

The behaviours of this group represented an important departure from some of the earlier clusters discussed above. Given that these individuals were content with the way they were, they were not looking for material and experiential consumption engagements to bring a significant improvement on their lives and felt no need to compensate for any personal shortcoming. They also did not exhibit aspirations that concerned material possessions or experiences, above and beyond what was already in their relatively close reach. Instead, during their occasional consumption spurges, what mattered to them was the experience driven by the motivation of escape, and consequently they also did not care much about product ownership.

Direct comparisons between the unhappy idealist (group 1) and the happy experientialists (group 4) are particularly insightful, as many of their actual behaviours are quite similar when taken out of context. The above respective discussions, however, demonstrated that when accounting for the process, motivations and greater context, the situation of the two groups is rather distinct. This also confirms that external context and the overall process of compensatory engagements are important to consider, which serves as an important contribution derived from this thesis

Summarising the information presented above, Table 5.4 showcases the details for the compensatory consumption process associated with the participants in the fourth and final group.

TABLE 5.4 Compensatory consumption process in cluster 4: The happy experientialists.

	Fiona	Florence	Hugo	Pedro
P R E A C Q U I S I T I O N	Predisposition	Highly controlled / disciplined professional life Frustrations with limited supply of goods	Financial constraints Living alone Frustrations with limited supply of goods	Complex logistics in family and professional life Limited time with children Frustrations with limited supply of goods
	Trigger	Sunny day Time available for shopping Staying in Parisian home base	Opportunity to socialise Professional trip Being in the mood	Period of austerity Spending pressure too strong Opportunity to socialise
	Motivation	Escape Reward Fun & enjoyment Experimentation with brands Attractive merchandise	Socialising Excitement Embracing live and let live mentality	Socialising Spending time with daughter Temporary rush
Acquisition	Independent event Source of enjoyment Random shopping sprees Brand fanaticism	Independent event Source of enjoyment Impulse consumption Obsessive tendencies Lack of control	Independent event Source of appreciation Impulse consumption Obsessive tendencies Domain-specific consumption	Independent event Source of appreciation Impulsive consumption Domain-specific consumption
Post-acquisition	Limited contemplation No regret Satisfaction	Joy No regret Satisfaction	Appreciation No regret Satisfaction	Anticipation No regret Satisfaction

In contrast with other groups, neither of the two antecedents played an extensively relevant role in the case of members of the fourth cluster. Participants voiced issues with too much externally imposed control in their everyday lives that limited their freedom, which often contributed to compensatory engagements motivated by distraction and escape. Although some triggers were identified, most individuals did not need a reason to shop. Instead, compensatory engagements were frequently initiated by situational triggers, such as having time available, facing a good opportunity to socialise, exposure to a particular time or context (such as returning to the office after a holiday), or simply being in the mood. The most important motivation for this group concerned the actual experience and enjoyment, placing substantially less emphasis on the material possession itself. Reflecting upon earlier work, these consumers were geared towards rewarding and uplifting sensations (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Amel et al., 2014), sharing, socialisation and group affiliation (Mugge et al., 2006), and other socially-orientated benefits (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2014).

Compensatory engagements in the case of happy experientialists were motivated largely by escape and breaking away from consumers' ordinary and highly controlled lives. Consumption was not considered as a way to address persistent frustrations or enduring needs. In fact, the actual and ideal selves of these consumers were highly congruent, and thus they did not need material goods to address any discrepancies or chase any ideals. Consequently, they were able to appreciate the consumption experience in its own right, and also to narrate their stories with joy, appreciation and excitement. They engaged in limited follow-up rationalisation, and emphasised enjoyment rather than remorse or regret. Importantly, compensatory engagements were not cyclical but rather independent events, often with a wide separation in time. In this sense, consumption engagements served more as an occasional means to a pleasant end, rather than an end in and of itself. In their regular engagements, consumers pursued utilitarian attributes like comfort, durability and quality. In their compensatory engagements, however, the focus was shifted to hedonic experiences as opposed to material possessions.

5-C. The role of context in compensatory consumption

As part of the greater processual approach discussed above in earlier sections, I also proposed to incorporate the role of context within the study of compensatory consumption. Such a direction extends prior research in that it moves beyond the sole focus on the act of consumption, which in turn allows capture of the importance of contextual cues and external factors as they influence consumer experience and choice. A few relevant references to context and its impact throughout the compensatory process were already mentioned in the above sections. In addition to exploring the individual impact of context through a more micro-level analysis, the current section will embrace a more macro-level analysis. This is important as some earlier research suggests that the combined effect of triggers and context may exert the greatest impact on compensatory decisions (Amos et al., 2014), although available evidence remains limited and sporadic. Consequently, the current discussion will be devoted to a more holistic and global evaluation regarding the role of context in compensatory endeavours within consumers' lifeworlds.

Similarly to the presentation of the earlier research question on process, contextual considerations will be explored separately for the four consumer types.

5-C.1. Consumer cluster 1: Unhappy idealists

Although predispositions seemed to exert the most profound influence on compensatory engagements in the case of unhappy idealists, context often played a role in ultimately triggering compensatory engagements. Consequently, in many cases contextual cues – which could range from upcoming social events, a conflictual experience, seasonal change to simple boredom – did not operate in isolation to initiate a compensatory cycle, but instead their influence emerged in combination with consumers' persistent insecurities and other triggers. For instance, relevant insecurities associated with physical appearance, self-esteem and professional or financial standing were often brought into awareness by different contextual triggers such as window displays, commercial messages, or anticipated special events, serving as a reminder for the insecurity. Pamela's quote provides a good example for this.

"I would say my shopping is seasonal. Especially now when we change from winter to summer. I have a couple of dinners to go to, and I think oh, I need a top or a shirt, and the other ones are old. They are old, I don't enjoy them anymore. I am just looking for something new. You know, something that makes me feel more confident. Something new. When the season changes." (Pamela)

Pamela became aware of the seasonal change (global contextual trigger) by an upcoming social dinner (immediate contextual trigger), which in turn reminded her of her general lack of confidence (predisposition) and desire for novelty (motivation). Although lack of confidence and desire for the pursuit of new things tended to permeate the majority of Pamela's general consumption, the contextual cues made her act upon her insecurities and realise the specific compensatory event. Similarly to Pamela's example, contextual triggers often served as a reminder of a perceived discrepancy between actual and ideal selves for other consumers as well, which in turn encouraged them to respond and remedy the gap through compensatory actions.

Although consuming and making purchases were common and occurred on a regular basis for members of this group, many participants also talked about 'browsing' without making actual purchases. For Pamela this was a way to remain up to date with current trends, for Flora to kill time given her unemployed status, and for Flavia to remain connected to consumer society despite her financial limitations. Two points need to be highlighted in this regard. On the one hand, casual browsing was most prevalent in the current consumer cluster, with members of the other three groups showing less ad hoc and more purposive consumption engagements. On the other hand, unhappy idealists tended to draw a clear separation between purposive and ad hoc shopping. When they were in the market for something specific, they often became frustrated when they were not successful, which in and of itself could trigger a compensatory cycle in order to avoid wasting time. Pamela, for instance, talked about feeling additional pressure when having spent hours looking for something and felt the need to conclude with an actual purchase. Flavia's two quotes below also reflect this duality well.

“In Bonne Marche, I think it’s just everything. I think it’s the overall atmosphere. First of all, they kind of unintrusive. They just let you kind of tour around and stuff. But I never felt like, no matter what I was wearing, I always felt like whether I was dressed, sometimes there are some salon ladies, they are all decked out designer here just to go shopping. And normally on a day to day I am not, I am just casual, very casual, but the thing is, I just always felt comfortable. I always felt that listen, if I really wanted, I really could, I just choose not to, because it doesn’t make financial sense right now, but if it was something, I would.” (Flavia)

“No because if I made a special trip or something, I am buying it. You know, if I made a special trip, because you know I need a purse, a bag, if I made a special trip, and I picked out the magic item, I am buying it, because I am here, and I don’t want to come back, because it takes time to come back and I have other stuff going on.” (Flavia)

In the first excerpt, Flavia talks about appreciating the atmosphere and feeling comfortable just looking around in the store, without necessarily buying something given her financial constraints. This is in line with earlier work that posits that consumption can provide experiential value for consumers, even if it does not conclude in an actual purchase (Kang, 2009). In the second quote, Flavia talks about making a special trip for something specific, picking out the ‘magic item’, at which point she feels the need to buy. These examples confirm that although purchases are important, consumption – and not necessarily the ownership of products – can also be meaningful for consumers.

As a further reflection on context, consumers’ preference to shop alone and in an unintrusive setting, as Flavia put it, was quite important. They showed a tendency to shop in large brick-and-mortar stores where they could maintain their anonymity and would also not think of going shopping with someone else. They found the involvement of staff often intrusive and preferred to be left alone. This again is in contrast with some of the other groups where consumers often did not mind shopping in the presence of others. In fact, this observation may be connected with participants’ frequent tendency to hide their purchases from others, as they feel guilty about spending. Petra’s quote provides a good representation for this.

“Maybe it probably it happens with the things that, not that I regret, but the buys that I’m a little bit ashamed of, the ones that I shouldn’t have made, probably. Kind of pretend it’s not there. No no, I didn’t do it, it wasn’t me. But then it keeps staying there, and at some point I take it out. OK, I will use it. It’s your time now. This can last for 2 or 3 or 4 months! [...] As long as I don’t have it, there’s this thing of, like I need this thing. Or I want it. But then once it’s yours, I mean it’s great, but then I realise that well, it was a lot of money, maybe I should have done something else. Maybe it’s guilt. I don’t know if it’s guilt. Maybe it’s a little bit of guilt.” (Petra)

Reflections such as ‘I didn’t do it’ and ‘it wasn’t me’ suggests regret in Petra’s experience, which may be a prevalent anticipation already during the act of consumption. These examples reiterate the constant fluctuation between conscious and unconscious thought processes, which are frequently at play during compensatory engagements among members of this group. Also, the ideal consumer self for many of these participants entailed being responsible and sustainable, which contradicted their compensatory actions, resulting in follow-up remorse and guilt.

Sharing newly acquired possessions with one’s social circle was quite rare and tended to occur in instances when motivated by social confirmation to justify the purchase. On the other hand, consumers sometimes engaged in consumption in anticipation of compliments from their surroundings, suggesting

that consuming did not end at the stage of acquisition but reached well into post-acquisition. Pamela's reflections provide a good representation for this.

"I can't keep things to myself. I just need to share them. To feel good, that I made the right choice. Or to say that 'yeah, you look nice'. Because I buy things for myself, especially the dress that I like, because they help me feel more confident and happier, so but I also want to look good socially. I don't know, you buy some dress or shoes, one thing I buy for myself to feel confident, and another thing if you want to impress guys or men. [...] I am brand connected, brand oriented, I don't know. And I share what I like, the group of my friends like the same brands. Maybe we are the same level of brand liking. So it's also. Oh, you have that, you have that, you know, we chat, OMG, I don't know, and I have my friends. Both places. And it's nice when you follow fashion. And your friends also, so it's like sharing the same liking and trends. [...] When there is a chance of wearing the same thing with someone... I don't like that. I don't like to be seen somewhere in the same clothes. [...] I think a lot, well not a lot, but I think how I am going to feel in a group of friends or in a club. But I think most important is how I am going to feel. So if it's something new or something that I really like it makes me feel more comfortable. I think more about how I feel in those clothes. So if they are becoming too old or I don't feel OK, I don't feel that I want to be in the picture with it, so my confidence goes down." (Pamela)

Although social media did not seem to play a strong role in other participants' stories, in the case of Pamela it was highly relevant. She described how the anticipation of seeing pictures shared on social media sites served as a motivating factor for her to purchase a new item, in order to avoid the risk of being seen in the same outfit on multiple occasions. Consistently with earlier observations, the above excerpt provides further support for triggers and motivations to operate in combination as opposed to in silos in initiating compensatory consumption engagements, which further confirms the value of discussing compensatory consumption as a process. Pamela, for instance, described in a single reflection wanting to feel more confident and look good socially (motivation to approximate ideal self-aspects), but also longed for a more immediate joy and hype achieved by seeing new consumer trends (motivation to stay relevant), or simply being out of the office and escaping from boredom or a rainy day (contextual trigger).

As another demonstration for the role of social confirmation, Flora's quote below confirms that compliments are particularly welcome for members of this group, and the value of an item could evolve as a function of how it is perceived by one's community.

"After you wear the dress, and your boyfriend compliments you, and everyone is like, oh, you look so good in that dress! And then you think it was worth the investment. Then I am happy." (Flora)

Some positive sentiments associated with a possession appeared to linger, such as in the case of Pamela's floral jacket or Paulo's Jaguar, as these items managed to provide continued positive social feedback that in turn helped consumers feel more confident about themselves. Other products, however, quickly fell into oblivion in the absence of further reinforcement. As consumers realised that their original goal anticipated from possessing a material item was not met, they soon looked for the next new thing in another cycle.

In summary, context was highly prevalent for participants in the first cluster in a variety of ways throughout the entire compensatory process. On the one hand, context often served as a trigger that evoked latent insecurities, which in turn initiated a compensatory engagement. In this sense, context did not have a direct role per se on compensatory consumption for this group, but instead played an

indirect function exerting an influence in collaboration with antecedents, other triggers and underlying motivations. On the other hand, context continued to play a role into the post-acquisition stage, either derived from the recognition that the original attempt was unsuccessful and consumers felt as bad or worse as before, or in some occasions derived from the continued positive social feedback that maintained a temporarily special consideration for a particular possession.

5-C.2. Consumer cluster 2: Aspirational non-conformists

Context played a role for participants in the second cluster as well, but differently from the first. In comparison to the unhappy idealists, these consumers were more self-accepting, although they still accounted for a discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves. Nonetheless, this was not only smaller, but also operated more in the background, placing less emphasis on compensatory engagements, as well as on the impact of contextual and other triggers. Consumers in this group were striving towards achieving their aspirational identity, which in large part was shaped by contemporary consumer trends and messages originating from their greater consumer context. They paid close attention to new and emerging consumer trends, with particular attention to mindfulness, decluttering and sustainability, which provided them with novel directions to incorporate into their overall sense of self.

“This Japanese woman, you know this book, the Art of Decluttering or something, it's very famous, it's a best seller. It's like, yeah. It's the bible of decluttering. So I'm all into decluttering. Because I have a small space, and I don't like having, buying things for the sake of buying. Because it used to happen to me a lot actually. Like I would buy on the impulse something which looked good on me, for instance, the sales, now I avoid going in January sales, because of the discount or whatever I would buy it. Because either I was tired, or whatever, I don't know, then I would come home, and it's either too big, or I don't like it, or too small, and then it's there hanging, and making me feel, you know not so good about that decision. So now I don't buy on sales.” (Fay)

Although as mentioned in the above section, aspirational non-conformists were more likely to engage in compromise rather than compensation, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6, there are a few relevant points to make as they relate to the role of context in compensatory engagements. As a general reflection, in their aspirations towards decluttering, consumers in this group wanted to establish a clean personal space where they only had things they wanted, appreciated and used. Closet space was an important consideration, and consumers often engaged in cleansing before they allowed themselves to introduce a new item.

“Something through mindfulness that I understood about myself, how important it is to have a clean space, and feng shui, and for instance taking picture for you for the, of my closet, made me understand the need to tidy up, but also, I don't allow myself, I don't feel good about buying something new unless I give away something I don't wear. So actually there is, like, there is a store in the Maray, where you can give it, if it is a brand, and they sell it for you. Or I would take them back home, my old clothes. So then I feel good, and then I allow myself to buy maybe one item.” (Fay)

As part of their greater mission, this group had a strong desire to minimise their exposure to mainstream environments and behaviours. Both Fay and Helena reflect upon this point, staying away from large brands.

"I don't, I guess I don't like buying in Paris, because it happened to me that I bought something, for instance I used to shop in Zara, but I stopped two years ago, three years. And then I'm wearing this nice top, and I'm going down my street, and there's a lady coming just wearing the same top, and it's frustrating (Fay)

"I love little markets. We went recently to Vienna to a small market, we bought a large mirror. But this is also, you keep buying things over your life, you select through them, and the expectation level is quite high. So there are only a few items that I would even consider buying, because I really say that this is indissmissible. We wouldn't choose many things any more, we are very selective. And that changed a lot over the years. For me, I can see on myself that I am really not interested any more in mainstream products like H&M. [...] I sometimes watch, like Zara or Mango, 90% of the things are plastic, viscose is still the better scenario, but mostly it's the polyamid. And of course I am not the target consumer group, it's clear." (Helena)

For these consumers, mainstream brands prevent them to be unique, which is an important consideration. Furthermore, as apparent from Helena's quote, the materials used do not fit with their environmentalist ideologies, further confirming their reluctance to shop in these settings.

Consumers generally avoided large shopping centres and preferred to shop either in small boutiques or online at the privacy of their home; driven in part by their motivation to maximise their ability to capture unique and special items that were distinct from the mainstream. Their own personal surroundings were of great importance for them, they sought a minimalist space that had unique items carrying an interesting story, and they were quite eager to receive positive feedback from their social circle concerning their possessions. For these consumers, positive social feedback served more as a reinforcement to support their aspirational identity, rather than a need to confirm value in their possessions, in contrast with the first group.

As a further reference to context, travel and change of scenery were particularly relevant in the case of this cluster, as they found they were able to obtain more unique items while being away from their usual surroundings. Along these lines, going to small markets in different cultural settings, for instance, or linking a possession to a special event accentuated the uniqueness of the item and added to the overall story of the consumers' collections. Fay's reflections provide a good example for this, contrasting her consumption experiences while traveling with being in her Parisian home base.

"So I'm like, when I travel, for instance when I go to Italy, and I like Italian fashion, like Florence, or when I go to New York, I end up being something, and so I'll bring back like a couple of items when I travel. Yeah, I don't know, when I travel, something happens. Like, it's like, I guess I'm just relaxed. Like here I'm more disciplined, about my finances, I don't want, because I have everything, like I have more shoes for instance that I wear, so it's like wasting really, because I don't need it. I'm not wearing all the clothes I have. But when I go on a vacation, I guess I just like relax, I open up, and I think I can buy it. And in Paris, it's like, it won't be super expensive, but I can look at it through different eyes." (Fay)

Aspiring to be a non-consumer, Fay used her travels to pursue unique possessions and diversify her otherwise disciplined consumer posture. She also seemed to be more likely to engage in impulsive purchases while being away from home, a consistent pattern across other consumers as well, which they justified easily as on these occasions they were more likely to obtain unique items.

In summary, context for the purposes of this group was important as long as it helped them approximate their aspirational consumer identity. Context was relevant to learn about new trends, to identify settings appropriate to pursue unique items, and to portray an appropriate image. Consumers' own personal context and surroundings were of great importance, as they reflected upon their

aspirational identities, which they could project to themselves as well as to the outside world. Their general non-consumerist ideologies were so prevalent that they tried to refrain from consumption as much as possible. Compensatory engagements emerged in their attempt to be in line with their aspirations, where context – with particular attention small markets, unique boutiques and travels – provided an approved outlet to pursue unique possessions.

5-C.3. Consumer cluster 3: Mental modelists

As described in detail above, compensatory consumption was less prevalent for members of this cluster, and in fact they worked hard to prevent compensatory occurrences in their everyday lives. For instance, Fatima reflected upon her modest Eastern European upbringing that was in large contrast with her present Western lifestyle, even as a student. She shared several reflections about being exposed to Western brands on TV as a child during communism, which seemed completely alien to her, along with the excitement and celebratory sentiments she felt when taken to a McDonald's for the first time. Such comparative reflections enabled her to maintain her priorities and careful posture with regards to her consumption, making sure not to fall prey to marketing influences or social pressures. She mentioned, for instance, catching herself being more impulsive in her purchases while shopping with her friends, which often resulted in suboptimal outcomes. In response, she made a conscious decision not to shop while on a social outing.

Some external cues such as good weather, as in the case of Fatima, or positive accomplishments and upbeat moods, as in the case of Phoebe and Francine, were likely to trigger positive compensatory engagements like self-gifting. Interestingly, negative events seemed to exert the opposite effect and these consumers often became withdrawn and shied away from consuming while battling with negative emotions, suggesting non-compensatory demeanours. Phoebe even commented that under these circumstances she would feel it would feel as if it was torture to shop. These reflections further confirm that members of this group were not as likely to fall prey to compensatory endeavours and worked hard to avoid such occurrences.

Periods of sales also seemed to discourage consumption in the case of this group, unless the particular item already appeared on the consumers' mental or actual lists. In other words, while they appreciated getting a better deal for a particular good they wanted, they were not willing to jeopardise their experience and subject themselves to long lines, insufficient stock and other nuisances. Some consumers like Peter and Francesca were too pragmatic to be influenced by external triggers, although they did report somewhat greater impulsivity when shopping with their children. These considerations will be important as they signal compromisory rather than compensatory comportments and will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

Consumers in this cluster were open to experimentation and tended to look for ideas and directions in their greater context for inspiration and input. For Holly, her sister's extravagant style and extensive use of colours encouraged her to occasionally venture out to making bolder purchases to try out new

things. She found second-hand stores to be particularly safe places for such experimentation, given the reduced price and hence lower risk of disappointment. Importantly, follow-up social feedback was no longer necessary, unlike in the case of the first two groups, and consumers in the current cluster remained generally happy with their purchases.

Particularly interesting observations could be made concerning the role of context in the case of certain consumers in this group, namely Fatima, Francesca, Peter and Phoebe, who all resided in a country that was different from their own national origin. Their new cultural settings exposed them to different styles and perspectives, which they seemed to approach with curiosity and an open mind. Francesca found Parisian women elegant and stylish, which gave her the opportunity to re-examine her own style that she considered less feminine and overly sporty. Phoebe's accounts echo these reflections, as she shared in many of her stories 'dressing to fit' to the expectations of others in respective groups.

"There was that little bubble for example in the US, it was a really rich environment. And most of the parents were really super rich, celebrities, doctors, really a lot of wealth. And they of course dressed the part, they had Gucci and I don't know what else. And it happened that we would organise every other week some dinner with the other parents, mostly the moms, like 'Desperate Housewives'. But that was really a time when everyone dressed up, and I also felt like yeah, for course, I have to dress up, I have to look good. These events you couldn't just show up in a T-shirt. [...] But I would also do this for myself, if I meet with someone, on the one hand I feel better like that myself, and on the other hand I give respect to the others by dressing up." (Phoebe)

Although she was quite happy with her own style and was not materialistic, she admitted to making more effort when anticipating engagements with individuals and social groups where she felt certain standards at play. This suggests instances of status-driven and conspicuous consumption engagements, at least when exposed to certain contexts.

Peter has also been residing in a foreign country for many years, and reflected upon the notion of a class society, which he felt strongly subjected to, particularly when exposed to his son's private school environment. He felt that this setting imposed certain expectations on him, in terms of his own clothing choices and other visible possessions. He noted wanting to make sure that his son would not be perceived unfavourably, as he considered he had every right to be there as he was also paying full tuition. He developed a hierarchical system to differentiate among his possessions – mostly clothing – as a function of context and visibility. On the first and most basic level, he had possessions intended for home use driven mostly by comfort. Next, he had some older pieces of clothing that were still ok to go to the grocery store but would not be used elsewhere. Following, he had clothing that was appropriate to pick up his son from school. Finally, he had certain outfits – such as his Hugo Boss shirts – which he wore on special occasions, such as on social outings with his friends or on dates. He noted not wanting to wear these items out, hence making sure to use them at times that 'fit the products' needs. The following excerpt reflects these observations:

"Well, I just don't buy these very often. A dress shirt, I haven't bought a dress shirt like in two years. And I don't use dress shirts. You know, if I were dating, I would need different dress shirts to go outside. But I don't go out all that much at all. At home I wear shorts and a jumper around the house. I only go to a couple of places. You know what I mean? And that's in part, nobody's gonna see it, why am I going to buy anything nice? [...] I mean I buy, but it's not a name brand, or not a luxury brand. I'm not gonna buy a Hugo Boss sweater to wear around the house. I'm gonna buy a Hugo Boss shirt if I wear it out with my friends. Or wear it on a date. I will wear nice

clothes when I date. As a practicality, I'm not dating, so the pressure is off. Do I need a new shirt? When am I gonna use it? For example, shirts, I'm gonna buy flannel shirts because they're warmer. But I'm only wearing those around the house. I'm not gonna buy Hugo Boss flannel shirt to wear around the house." (Peter)

In summary, consumers in the third cluster often looked for inspiration to their external context in order to experiment with new styles or to fit with the expectations of different contextual settings, but these modifications were relatively minor and incremental. Compensatory engagements were substantially less prevalent and occurred mostly in instances of self-gifting and to some extent conspicuous consumption. Consumption was not as central of an activity for this group as in the case of the previous two clusters and was viewed as a natural part of life. As a result, social feedback was also not a necessary component for consumers to be able to fully appreciate a particular item. This is in contrast with the first group who relied extensively on social feedback and compliments to evaluate their possessions and assess their value. This approach also represents a departure from the second group, who followed contemporary consumer trends that enabled them to approximate their aspirational consumer identities. Members of the present cluster showcased instances of compensatory consumption for exploration, experimentation, to feed their curiosity, and to some extent to fit in, without the ulterior aim of pursuing a particular consumer ideal that required a qualitative change.

5-C.4. Consumer cluster 4: Happy experientialists

Consumers in the fourth cluster all reported highly structured and controlled daily lives, from which they seemed to need an occasional escape. Fiona travelled extensively for her job, which did not allow her much time to disconnect. She reported particular enjoyment when being able to take advantage of her Parisian neighbourhood stores and just shop. Florence's pressures originated from two sources; on the one hand she needed to make ends meet and ensure her own financial security, and on the other hand she wanted to compensate for living alone. She welcomed social outings, which enabled her to let herself go and even allow herself to be more impulsive and enjoy the moment.

Hugo also faced complex family logistics, and particularly welcomed going on shopping trips with his daughter. In the case of both Florence and Hugo, the products consumed were not as important, and they enjoyed the experience itself. Finally, Pedro was also subjected to intense external pressures from his job and welcomed the opportunity of escape when planning for and anticipating a family holiday or wine event. Although he did not like shopping per se, he appreciated these opportunities as they enabled him to rescue himself from his highly controlled daily routine.

As mentioned above, consumers in this cluster were not really interested in the product or service itself, but rather the experience or the anticipation that came with it. In contrast to earlier clusters, this group took full advantage of the process of their consumer experience, often regardless of the final purchase; and for this the context was highly relevant. For Fiona wandering the streets of Paris, for Florence being out and about and 'living and let live', for Hugo spending time with his daughter, and

for Pedro contemplating the anticipated enjoyment he would gain from going on a trip or sharing a bottle of wine with friends.

Overall, context had somewhat less direct impact for members of the fourth cluster, except for presenting the appropriate setting to enjoy a particular consumer experience. Participants used consumption as a form of escape from their daily lives and controlled existence but were otherwise largely uninterested in the product per se and instead received the greatest satisfaction from the process. In this sense, context was important to provide the right setting for a consumer experience that allowed a form of escape from daily life and highly controlled environments.

5-C.5. Summary

The above section presented the role of context in detail, separately for each of the four consumer clusters. In the case of the first cluster of unhappy idealists, context played an important role throughout the whole compensatory consumption process. It remained strong even into the post-acquisition stage, as consumers either recognised their lack of need satisfaction or used social feedback to assess the value of their possessions. In the second cluster of aspirational non-conformists, context was important in the sense of learning about relevant consumer trends that could be incorporated into their consumer self, and also in terms of follow-up confirmation from others. In the third cluster of mental modelists, context was used for experimentation and ensuring consumer-context fit. Finally, in the fourth group of happy experientialists, satisfactory contextual settings were important to allow participants the opportunity for escape and experiential pursuits. Table 5.5 presents a summary for the role of context across the different stages of the compensatory consumption process, separately for each of the four consumer clusters.

TABLE 5.5 The role of context throughout the compensatory consumption process for the four consumer clusters.

	1. Unhappy idealists	2. Aspirational non-conformists	3. Mental modelists	4. Happy experientialists
P R E A C Q U I S I T I O N	Predisposition	Brought into awareness by contextual cues Ideal self in line with societal expectations	Consumer history Context as reminder of aspirational self Relevant consumer trends (decluttering, mindfulness, sustainable consumption)	Social context as inspiration
	Trigger	A range of contextual cues (upcoming social event, conflictual experience, seasonal change, boredom, commercial messages, window displays)	Appropriate settings Travel	Upcoming social event Exposure to different cultures Transitional periods (e.g. student or unemployed status) Mood Achievement
	Motivation	Combined effect with predispositions and contextual triggers	Avoid mainstream consumption Pursue unique items with a special story Stand out from the crowd	Fit with cultural trends Fit with societal expectations
Acquisition		Private consumption Brick-and-mortar stores Browsing vs. purposeful consumption	Purposeful consumption	Escape and distraction from social reality
Post-acquisition		Seeking social confirmation Seeking compliments Hiding purchases from others	Seeking aspirational social image (projected to self and others)	Appreciation Sharing
				Celebration Enjoyment Sharing

5-D. General summary of the compensatory consumption process and the role of context

The above section provided an extensive overview of the compensatory consumption process across the four consumer clusters, followed by an in-depth exploration of the role of context in compensatory endeavours. On the most fundamental level, consumers varied in their perceived discrepancy between their ideal and actual selves and the extent to which they accepted their consumer identity, which in turn had a strong impact on many of their consumption-related decisions. Importantly, the first group that exhibited the greatest incongruity between their actual and ideal selves also displayed the widest array of compensatory engagements, as was apparent by the breadth and depth of discussions concerning their consumer stories. In terms of predispositions, some groups portrayed enduring and persistent frustrations that surfaced on a regular basis and were triggered easily into awareness, often escalating without the consumers' control. On the other end of the spectrum and in the case of other groups, predispositions were more transient, temporary and situational, with consumers being able to retain a greater sense of control.

Most triggers operated in combination drawing on enduring needs and a collection of triggers, further justifying the importance of examining consumer experiences in a holistic fashion, in a way that takes into account the lifeworld of the consumer. This was particularly the case for the first consumer cluster of unhappy idealists, who showcased the widest range of predispositions as well as triggers in comparison to the other three groups. Similarly, motivations for some groups were driven by making up for earlier frustrations and correcting habits or lifestyle choices, with the focus being on substantial change and improvement. In the case of other groups, however, consumption engagements were motivated by transient needs. Behaviours also varied ranging from recurrent compensatory cycles to more sporadic and isolated consumption events. In terms of the post-acquisition stage, positive and negative thoughts and emotions were frequent across the four groups, with some emphasising regret and remorse while others focusing more on product ownership and usage or the sheer enjoyment of the experience.

As for general comportments, some participants seemed quite rational in their consumption engagements, were happy to talk about their experiences, and did not face much post-purchase regret. In contrast, others were less rational, fluctuated between conscious and unconscious reasoning, and engaged in extensive follow-up rationalisation. Finally, the notion of anticipation regarding consumption engagements with a future orientation seemed important for participants but manifested themselves in different ways for different groups. While in some cases the anticipation served as a means to approximate one's ideal self, in other cases the product or experience and the joy they were expected to bring remained the principal focus.

Regarding the role of context, for unhappy idealists contextual cues served a major role in bringing enduring insecurities into awareness, in turn triggering compensatory consumption cycles. The interaction between predispositions, triggers and motivations were most prevalent in the case of this group, as the persistent insecurities were omnipresent and constantly lingered in the background,

making it relatively easy for contextual cues to bring them to the surface. As we move away from the unhappy idealists, context becomes more relevant in its own right, making compensatory engagements less detrimental and more reward-based and celebratory. In the case of the aspirational non-conformists, who took pride in being non-consumers, context gave rise to relevant consumer trends and also presented an opportunity to confirm aspirational ideals to themselves as well as to their social circles. For mental modelists, context provided ideas for inspiration with which to experiment, and finally for happy experientialists, the right context presented a medium to escape and enjoy experiential processes. Such a differentiation concerning the role of context in the area of compensatory consumption is novel and serves as an important contribution of the present work.

The above results confirm the importance of taking a processual approach to compensatory consumption, one that incorporates the role of context. Importantly, while the first group of unhappy idealists can be considered ‘classic’ compensatory consumers as portrayed in the literature, the present work shows that this view of compensatory consumption is too narrow and overly simplistic, necessitating a more comprehensive approach. In this sense, the present work expands the literature by identifying a wider range of compensatory consumption engagements, as represented by the other consumer groups. In particular, as we move beyond the traditional view of compensation to address a lingering discrepancy between actual and ideal selves, we find that context can help provide a richer understanding of compensatory engagements, as experienced within the lifeworld of consumers.

In the following chapter, I turn to exploring the remaining two research questions; pertaining to the compensatory consumption continuum and the role of compromise in consumer experiences.

CHAPTER 6.

RESULTS III: THE CONTINUUM OF COMPENSATORY CONSUMPTION AND LINKS TO CONSUMER COMPROMISE

6-A. Chapter outline

In the previous chapter, I examined the first two research questions pertaining to how the process of compensatory engagement was experienced within the everyday lives of individuals, and what role context played in these endeavours. In the current chapter I turn to exploring the remaining two research questions that concern the compensatory consumption continuum and the role of compromise in consumer experiences. Similarly to Chapter 5, I will discuss each research question separately for the different consumer clusters. At the end, I will integrate the results into a comprehensive framework to capture the key drivers and motivations that underpin compensatory and compromisory engagements across the four groups. Given the breadth and richness of the stories and interview excerpts presented throughout Chapter 5, the current chapter will build on this material to some extent and synthesise the information to avoid redundancy. Nevertheless, additional quotes and experiences that have not been shared before and are relevant will be introduced when appropriate to provide further support for emerging trends and ideas.

6-B. The continuum of compensatory consumption

In the current section, I explore the continuum of compensatory consumption to see how relevant these behaviours are for participants in the different consumer clusters. Importantly, as will be demonstrated throughout this section, the complexity of compensatory consumption engagements can only be captured as long as we simultaneously account for the process and the context. Consequently, relevant references will continue to be made in order to assist our full understanding of compensatory experiences from the consumer perspective within their lifeworld. I conclude this section by offering a summary that reflects the prevalence of compensatory consumption across the four consumer types.

6-B.1. Consumer cluster 1: Unhappy idealists

The vast majority of consumption for members of this group was compensatory in nature, as they were perpetually chasing an unattainable ideal. Consumers struggled with a range of enduring personality characteristics and persistent insecurities that permeated their experience. Consumption acts were used in an attempt to achieve at least a temporary relief for persistent frustrations and to minimise the substantial gap between ideal and actual selves. Members of this group often engaged in overconsumption, hiding, and experienced post-purchase guilt and remorse. As their compensatory engagements only resulted in limited and temporary or often no need satisfaction, relapses into new compensatory cycles were likely.

The behaviours of members in this group encompassed the widest array of compensatory compartments, ranging from obsessive / compulsive through sporadically therapeutic forms. Impulsive, addictive and even obsessive and compulsive tendencies were common both in relation to consumer goods and to food and drinks. Heidi and Hannah, for instance, both revealed frustrations about their tendency to overconsume food and alcohol, particularly when exposed to others' influence. Paulo fluctuated between sporadic periods when he managed to exercise and adopt a healthier lifestyle, which made him feel good about himself. However, he also admitted to easily slip and resume his old overconsuming and 'decadent' habits where he easily felt like a 'fat slob', which in turn resulted in compensatory engagements.

In addition, several of the consumer stories demonstrated highly obsessive tendencies in relation to clothing and other consumer goods as well. Pamela, for instance, recalled an instance where she wanted to get an item so badly that she mobilised several international acquaintances to achieve her goal. Pamela's quote below provides a nice demonstration for the length some consumers can go to secure their pursuit. In her case, she ended up involving multiple people to provide assistance in her quest to pursue an item abroad that was not available in her country of residence.

"It happened. And you know what, I went out of my way to get that item. I called other stores, I called other cities, I even once, I remember asking my dad to ask another friend in Germany to pay by card to deliver to the Netherlands to get it. So sometimes I really, I get what I want but sometimes it's not that easy. And many lessons I had like that." (Pamela)

Petra shared a similar account concerning a pair of shoes, using expressions like 'I'm probably a little bit addicted', 'I have the feeling that if I don't have them my life will be horrible, and not even worth living'. At the end, following a sequence of contemplations and finally purchasing the product, Petra admitted that the shoes stayed in her closet for months without being opened; signalling compulsive characteristics. These excerpts also confirm that for many consumers the 'chase' and the pre-acquisition stage are most important, placing less emphasis on the product ownership itself.

Impulsive tendencies often surfaced in combination with the obsessive and compulsive compartments outlined above. In many cases, consumers contemplated and 'chased' a product for some time, but then the actual purchase was often made on impulse, as triggered by a contextual cue or a transient emotional state. These consumers admitted to browsing on a regular basis and were influenced by commercial messages and window displays to trigger compensatory behaviours. As outlined above in the section of context, these triggers often brought a particular insecurity into awareness, which consumers were driven to remedy through a piece of clothing or a pampering dessert.

Many participants in this cluster seemed highly materialistic and were also preoccupied by others' evaluation of them. Consequently, they often shared their desire for material goods that were either unique or communicated a certain status. As showcased in their stories, the behavioural patterns of Flavia, Pamela, Petra, Paulo and Flora in particular reflected upon strongly conspicuous tendencies. Nonetheless, perhaps not linked to status per se directly, social confirmation and compliments were important in the case of Heidi and Hannah as well. Occasional references signalling retail therapy was

prevalent more as a form of post-consumption rationalisation. Importantly, members of this group did not receive much gratification from their purchases, which in turn limited their ability to achieve even temporary or partial need-satisfaction.

In addition, consumers revealed frequent fluctuations between conscious and unconscious reasoning. For instance, many participants shared certain sentiments during their interview such as ‘I must sound really shallow’ (Flora) or ‘this sounds quite bad, right?’ (Petra); suggesting that individuals were concerned about the content of their stories and felt uneasy about exposing them to someone else. When such discomfort arose, they often shifted to emphasise the atypical nature of the described event that was highly unrepresentative of their normal behaviours. Participants’ apparent feelings of shame often triggered temporary withdrawal from sharing information, and many of them – when feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed about a particular experience – reverted to increased rationalisation by switching to behaviours and preferences that were more in line with societal expectations and socially accepted ideals. Petra, for instance, admitted that she knew perfectly well that material possessions would not make her a happier person, and thus she did not really care about them. At the same time, her stories were filled with elements of excitement associated with the pursuit and chase of material goods, at times bordering obsession. In this sense, participants frequently alternated between conscious and unconscious processing, giving more conscious rational responses when feeling at risk, yet being more at ease when ‘losing themselves’ in the elaboration of actual stories.

Justifications aiming to confirm behavioural alignment with consumer ideals in one case extended even beyond the interview itself. During several of her accounts, Flora admitted to eyeing a Chanel bag as an outlet of her desire, and shared other stories that reflected similar preferences to pursue high-end luxury goods. Interestingly, in a follow-up message a few days after the interview, she wrote to confirm that in fact she did not really care about consumption or the possession of material goods, but instead preferred expanding resources for continuing education that added greater value to her life.

“After-thought regarding the market-research of purchasing behaviour: I was assuming that purchasing items were tangible goods. If not, my key purchase (major cost drive) last year was attending a major conference (in her area of expertise). Does that count? I am also considering a one-week training course. [...] As much as I would like to purchase a Chanel handbag, it’s the lowest item on my priority list.” (Flora)

Such reflections were consistent in other examples as well, with similar defence mechanism employed to avoid the risk of being judged unfavourably.

In summary, consumers in the first cluster showcased behaviours that reflected a wide array of compensatory consumption types, including obsessive-compulsive tendencies, proneness to addictions and buying on impulse. When exploring the compensatory consumption process in a holistic fashion, several of these behaviours seemed to occur in combination. As an example, Petra’s story of her shoes entailed conspicuous characteristics, along with obsession as well as impulse. Importantly, given the lack of need satisfaction, compensatory engagements for members of this group were recurrent and cyclical. Post-purchase rationalisations and justifications were common, as consumers were trying to

resolve the discrepancy between their behaviours vis-à-vis the image they would like to project to themselves as well as to their outside world.

6-B.2. Consumer cluster 2: Aspirational non-conformists

As a significant departure from the first group of unhappy idealists, consumers in the second cluster were more content with their lives, demonstrated a substantially greater extent of self-acceptance, and had a smaller discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves. Consequently, their behaviours did not represent the full spectrum of compensatory consumption engagements, as there were no instances of obsessive, compulsive or addictive tendencies throughout the consumer stories. In fact, members of this group indicated a general disinterest in shopping, cared a lot about their clean space and disliked clutter. Despite their more extensive compensatory engagements as evidenced by their impulsive and compensatory comportments from their past, these consumers made conscious efforts to break away from these habits which they currently viewed undesirable.

In the case of Fanny, she noted that she used to be a comfort shopper, but once her children were born, she changed and became more rational and concerned about certain greater causes like sustainability. She became frustrated by having too many things in her household, and decided to ‘declutter’, in line with the new consumer trends with which she became familiar. Fay displayed similar tendencies. She admitted consuming ‘to make her feel better’ some years back while still married, but then afterwards she became involved in mindfulness – personally as well as professionally, which triggered a substantial change in her life that was also reflected in her consumption habits. Although Fay’s story demonstrates a conscious move away from compensatory consumption, the marketisation of mindfulness presents a trend that in a way shifts her compensation from occasional past incidents of retail therapy to a more socially acceptable market-mediated practice in pursuit of an aspirational identity; a point that will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 7. Finally, when talking about her present consumption patterns, Helena admitted to increasingly appreciating aspects of her life, such as spending time with her family and friends and engaging herself in interesting projects, which influenced a shift in her priorities.

In general, the primary motivation in the case of these consumers underlying their compensatory tendencies was associated with the pursuit of an aspirational consumer identity that was in line with their beliefs and with certain consumer trends that resonated with them. On the one hand, much of their consumption revealed ideologies to be distinct from the mainstream consumer society that focused extensively on mindless over-consumption in large shopping centres. On the other hand, they went to great lengths to contemplate their own purchases to ensure that they were special and unique enough to fit with the aspirational identity they sought to achieve.

Fanny, for instance, who at the time of the interview was in the market to buy a house, commented that she would never own a property with a swimming pool, as she cared too much about the environment, and considered swimming pools an unsustainable waste. Helena cared a great deal about

her surroundings, following her newfound interest and follow-up coursework in interior design. She constantly searched for items that were unique and represented a blend of current trends and her own preferences. She pursued special items, chose not to shop in places intended for the ‘masses’; whether for her own purposes or for her house. She enjoyed nice wines and culinary delights and was careful about choosing suitable locations for her family holidays that would maximise their enjoyment and satisfaction. Finally, Fay cared a lot about the image she projected to the outside world, and was careful, for instance, to maintain a Facebook profile that fit with her aspirational personal as well as consumer identity. She was also cautious about selecting clothing for herself, pursuing brands and online outlets that were unique and different from the masses.

For members of this group, external confirmation and positive social feedback were key considerations, contributing to a large extent to their conspicuous endeavours. They kept up with important consumer trends and were pertinent in their selection and choice of items to maintain their desired consumer identity. In terms of the compensatory consumption continuum, these consumers recognised that they used to fall prey to external pressures, and at present commented on taking conscious steps to avoid these instances from occurring. Given their approach involving extensive and laborious pre-purchase planning and contemplation, they seldom experienced post-purchase denial, regret or remorse.

From across the spectrum of compensatory continuum, these consumers did not seem to display negative comportments such as addiction or obsessive and compulsive behaviours. They were, however, rather conscious about their personal and social image, which drove them towards conspicuous engagements. Whenever they pursued items that in some way reflected upon their identities, they were very careful and meticulous, and used constant reiterative reflection to assess the item’s anticipated value and coherence.

There was one exception to the generally controlled and calculative comportments in the case of these participants, which emerged during travel and special events. More specifically, in line with consumers’ overall preference for special and unique items that communicated a statement, they often preferred to consume while traveling, as these settings ensured purchases with a higher potential for distinctiveness. They also admitted to being more relaxed during these times, and occasionally even confessed impulsive comportments while away from home. Given their extensive planning and contemplation, these consumers seldom experienced follow-up regret or remorse, and often managed to achieve at least temporary need satisfaction. At the same time, as their consumer identities kept evolving with the identification of and awareness of new consumer trends and directions, they constantly re-evaluated their current as well as future purchases, in order to match their aspirational ideals.

In summary, aspirational non-conformists portrayed behaviours that captured a narrower spectrum of compensatory consumption, but nonetheless remained prevalent. Participants were particularly likely to engage in conspicuous and status consumption, pursuing goods and experiences for their signalling

value as confirmed by the outside world. In contrast with the first consumer cluster, compensation in their case was not intended to address prolonged and persistent insecurities, but instead concentrated on approximating aspirational identities. As will be further elaborated below, given their highly rational operation, consumer-driven compromise – as opposed to compensatory consumption – may present a more suitable description to represent these consumers' activities.

6-B.3. Consumer cluster 3: Mental modelists

In significant contrast with the previous two groups, mental modelists did not embrace qualitatively different ideals nor wished to pursue aspirational identities, but instead seemed self-accepting of the ways they were. Small and incremental adjustments were mentioned in relation to certain transitional periods such as being a student like Fatima and Francine or facing temporary unemployment like Francesca. Similarly, other relatively minor points were brought up by Holly in wanting to be more colourful, or by Francesca in desiring to be more feminine and less sporty.

Importantly, the primary motivation for these consumers focused on need satisfaction, aiming to get the most out of their purchases. They were quite rational in their consumption and reflected upon individual experiences for purposes of learning and continuous improvement. As reflected in the name of their cluster, these participants established mental models to improve their consumption and maximise their satisfaction, while minimising compensatory or impulsive encounters. Their consumption activities were self-contained and did not lead to cyclical relapses.

Despite their generally rational and calculating demeanours, consumers often reported a somewhat greater willingness to engage in impulsive purchases while with their children. For instance, during an experience when Phoebe was unable to find anything for herself, she would opt for buying things for her children as a way to justify her efforts and commitment and to avoid the frustration of having wasted time. Francesca – who generally found it difficult to shop for herself – enjoyed the simplicity of buying for her kids and also did not mind being more impulsive. Peter was a highly pragmatic shopper, yet he mentioned that he did not need to be an impulse shopper himself, as he had her son for that.

With respect to the compensatory consumption continuum, there was no incident suggesting compulsive or addictive engagements in the case of this group. Impulse purchases occurred on some occasions, as illustrated by the examples above, but predominantly in experiential forms of consumption, such as food, drinks or social activities, or in relation to children. In fact, these participants seemed to develop quite effective coping mechanisms to combat being victimised by impulse, as evidenced for instance by their shopping lists. Consumers tried to avoid situations where they felt under pressure, as they feared – based on past experience – that such situations may result in suboptimal outcomes and later regret. Fatima, for instance, mentioned her preference to refrain from shopping while out with friends, as she recalled negative prior experiences where she ended up making suboptimal decisions. Similarly, Phoebe would stay away from sales staff to avoid the additional pressure to commit to making a potentially undesirable purchase. Some other purchases were of conspicuous nature, as in

the case of Peter who opted for certain products that he felt would be expected by his contextual surroundings, or Phoebe trying to match the tendencies of and fit in with her respective social circle.

Self-gifting was quite common for members of this group. Francine, for instance, discussed going to Starbucks as a recurrent theme in her daily life. She tended to go there as a treat, loved the coffee and cakes, and in general Starbucks for her was 'always a good idea'. Whenever something bad happened, she went there to cheer herself up, and whenever something good happened, she went there to reward herself. She seemed to have a strong attachment and even love for the brand. In the case of Peter, the times he spent with his friends were very special, not only because of the experience but also because of the lack of frequency, given that he lived away from most of his close friends and family. He planned for these encounters in advance and made the most of them while he had the chance. Otherwise, reward was not a necessary element and remained quite sporadic, as these consumers felt they had most things they needed and were not pursuing anything extraordinary, consumption was a natural part of their life.

In summary, consumers in the third cluster represented a significant departure from the earlier two groups in that they did not use consumption to pursue an ideal or aspirational consumer identity, and hence were at ease with their actual selves most of the time. Their consumption engagements were largely independent, and the key motivation was centred on need satisfaction and getting the most enjoyment out of a given purchase. Participants embraced some elements of retail therapy, self-gifting and reward consumption, but these tended to be celebratory and yielded no follow-up regret or remorse. They achieved a high level of need satisfaction, and although they reflected upon their experience for their own learning, they did not contemplate the purchase itself in the sense of regret or need for social confirmation. As in the case of the second group, given their rational operations, it may be more appropriate to classify consumers' impulsive and compulsive behaviours as compromisory rather than compensatory. Further information on this will be provided in later sections.

6-B.4. Consumer cluster 4: Happy experientialists

Participants in the fourth cluster were the most content with their lives as well as personal situations amongst the four consumer clusters, which is reflected in their high congruence between their actual and ideal selves and high levels of self-acceptance. They were quite rational and realistic in terms of their general consumption, and in light of their overall dislike for shopping could even be considered non-consumers. Interestingly, as discussed at length during Chapter 5, their compensatory consumption experiences emerged during particular times, contexts or opportunities in which they often exhibited highly impulsive and addictive tendencies. Importantly, however, these engagements were in large contrast to their general consumer demeanour, and also manifested themselves differently from the group of unhappy idealists.

As a general tendency, consumers alternated between periods of extensive control and even full abstinence, and then letting loose either when the pressure built up too much or simply when a good opportunity presented itself to socialise or partake in an otherwise pleasant experience. Participants

were largely indifferent about their possessions and – except for a few sentimental items – approached them as easily replaceable. For these consumers the consumption process and experience were the most important. They did not spend extensive time contemplating a purchase nor engage at all in follow-up rationalisation, and hence even those incidents that may have seemed somewhat impulsive or addictive when viewed by outsiders out of context were accepted easily by these consumers. The important point to recognise is that these participants were motivated not by the product but by the experiential process itself, and as long as the experiential component was positive, they were happy about the overall consumption event.

Regarding the compensatory consumption continuum, members of this cluster seemed to display rather interesting trends. As mentioned above, they could go for extended periods of time without shopping at all, but when eventually decided to consume, they often exhibited rather impulsive and additive tendencies, at least in certain domains. For Fiona these domains concentrated on shoes and bags, for Hugo on Timberland boots, jeans, and items for the house, for Pedro wine and holidays, and for Florence pretty much anything that the other person she was with wished to shop for. Importantly, the above goods were embedded in a greater actual or anticipated social experience, where the material item was simply a means to an end rather than the end in itself. Consumers admitted openly to their occasionally impulsive behaviours, and shared their stories with an element of joy, excitement, and appreciation. Fiona discussed her infatuation with shoes, and in her interview excerpt below she talks about buying a shoe as it was ‘just calling’ for her. Sometimes she admitted buying shoes she knew she would not be able to wear, as she always wears sport shoes, but nonetheless, she felt she had to have them.

“Oh yeah, sure, shoes. Obviously, you go for one pair of shoes, and you get at least two because this one was just calling for you. Bags, not. Because really when I want a new bag, I know I want one, and I don’t have enough money to just go and get more. Impulse is for shoes for me. When I go shopping for clothes, I don’t say I need one, I say I need two or three. So it is only for shoes.” (Fiona)

Florence tended to be quite controlled and careful with her spending in general, but then admitted to certain impulsive comportments either when buying cheese or wine, or as explained below, when on a social outing with a friend. She reflected upon this duality by combining being ‘planned and organised’ with ‘allowing herself to be impulsive’.

“No, they were not planned at all. They were extreme. It’s everything. And food. You know, that truffle cheese looks good, so let me get that. So I allow myself to be somewhat planned and organised, and I allow myself to be impulsive as well. I am and I allow it.” (Florence)

Florence repeatedly referred to ‘allowing’ herself to go shopping, letting herself be impulsive, and she talked about her experiences with such joy and gratification, there was no sense of remorse or guilt in her description. As described in her story below, Florence shared a social outing with a friend, where she ended up spending a large amount of money on make-up and other accessories that were not planned nor necessary, but as ‘she was in the mood’ she went ahead and purchased them anyway. To stay safe, she admitted to checking her bank account before committing to a social event where she anticipated

to spend money. Once she confirmed that she had sufficient funds to be able to let herself 'loose', she felt it was OK to go all the way; including going out for lunch with her friend once they were done with shopping.

"I went shopping with Laura recently, she's my friend, and I helped her buy stuff. [...] And I was just giving advice. You know, it was fun. It was fun to help her. [...] Such a good challenge. She thought 270 was a little much to spend on make-up, so, and I think so too, so I held back, and said we don't need this, we don't need that, and we got it down to 150. And then I spent 170 on myself, even though I didn't need to. But I was just in the mood. In the mood, so I was impulsive. And there I was with her! I, oh, I got a base, a foundation that covers red spots, I already had my foundation, coloured foundation, but I had two, one that's green colour, and one that you spread over. I got two sub foundations, I got a great mascara, I got this pencil that it's that white that you put on the inside of the eye, to take away the red and it opens up your eye because it makes your eye bigger. [...] I got anti-circle serum which I have to learn how to use. Because she showed me where to put it and where not to put it. [...] Then I told my friend, oh, there is, I'm so glad we are on this street, because I want to go next door because there is this store next door that I've been to several times, they sell the best body scrub. It's 50 euros and I love it. And once you're in the store, they have stations set up, and they just try to sell sell sell. So they tried to get me, and I bought body scrub, I bought nail treatment, and I bought face peels. And they tried to get me for 80 and they only got me for 50 euros. So for 50 euros I got my body scrub and a new mousse thrown in. Anyway, I was very happy. So I went home having spent some money, but I kind of knew when I went with my friend that I had already checked my bank account, I had more money in it than I thought, so I allowed myself to go for lunch with her and she said to me, oh I didn't want to propose lunch because you told me you were watching your money." (Florence)

In Florence's case the experience had a clear social charge that was giving her a lot of excitement and enjoyment, even though admittedly it ended up being a highly impulsive spree. Florence talked throughout her interview a lot about not liking to be alone and appreciating being able to spend time with others. The above experience enabled her to not only shop but also to extend the social experience to having lunch with a friend, while 'helping her out'. The whole experience, being on an outing, interacting with salespeople and helping her friend created an atmosphere for her which she enjoyed so much that she was able to let her guard down and go with the flow. And what is particularly important to emphasise is that she encountered no remorse or follow-up regret and was happy to talk about her story as it enabled her to relive it once again. This example will be revisited during the discussion below on compromise, as it presents a good demonstration for the co-occurrence between compensatory and compromisory engagements within the same consumption event.

Florence's experience illustrates the strong element of impulse, but also highlights the fact that if taken out of context she may be mistaken for a generally impulsive or even compulsive compensatory consumer. At the same time, knowing her overall posture and background, it is clear that these engagements are rather sporadic rather than cyclical, and are not in any way intending to address a personal insecurity or shortcoming. Instead, these examples illustrate impulsive purchases motivated by escape to do something different from the day-to-day routine.

In addition to impulse, there were further representations of conspicuous consumption and retail therapy along the compensatory consumption spectrum. In the case of Fiona, she noted appreciating nice brands, and enjoyed shopping for them, particularly in the case of shoes and bags.

"I'm just crazy about bags and shoes. Unfortunately, the whole stereotype. I can shop for bags all time long. But when I was little, any bag would have been ok. But now you are living in Paris, and you're like, oh, that's really bad. I had purses, my old room at my parents' house had all the purses in the world. All sizes, all colours.

I had one bag for each colour. And then you go to Paris, and like, oh there are those fashion bags also, you have to slow down a little bit. But they advertise. Shoes the same. I can't walk on the heels, but I will still buy some because they're pretty. Because they are calling me. [...] Bags I get Louis Vuitton is fantastic. I have the dream of one day buying me a Givenchy bag, but they are so expensive it is ridiculous. So maybe I am going to go crazy one time and buy one. The shoes, new balance because the sneakers are fantastic. When you live in Paris, all the streets that you go to have really pretty brands. And then like, all brands that you are never going to put on you but you want it. It's ridiculous." (Fiona)

Fiona's case is also interesting in that she often pursues high end merchandise, despite recognising that she would not be able to wear several of them. This is in contrast with the general proposition of conspicuous consumption, whereby consumers purchase goods for purposes associated with communicating status and achieving social recognition. These were not primary considerations for Fiona, as she did not anticipate necessarily using these possessions. Instead, she focused on the experience of walking around the streets of Paris and being exposed to a great variety of high-end brands and unique fashion styles.

"When do I shop? It's a good question. I think, like it's getting cold, so I'm like I'm going to have to shop because my former stuff is not... Because when I need it I shop, also when I have time. Like, I walk a lot, I like walking, I like, I would say that 'leisure walker', just go and see shops... I don't need a reason to shop, which is ... bad.... Just go and have a look... in gallery Lafayette in the bag section. Just to have a look... I don't think I need a reason. Yeah, like I bought my first luxury bag because ok, you earned enough money, you worked hard, you deserve something so let's go. When it's more expensive, it's more like ok you treat yourself because you feel you deserve it, or you find a good reason. No, I don't need a reason to shop. I think when you live in Paris, you don't really feel like you need a reason to shop. I have time, let's go out, it's a good week." (Fiona)

Although not explicitly stated, much of the behaviours of these consumers fit the general auspices of retail therapy by achieving 'highs' not necessarily from the possession itself but rather from the consumption process. As mentioned above, consumers are not really concerned about the actual product ownership, but instead they appreciate the process and a nice experience. Hugo provides a good example for this.

"I don't think so. It's fun to get stuff. Like wanting stuff or keep having stuff is not particularly satisfying. But getting something new is fun, that's where you get the rush. It's definitely therapeutic in that way, for short term. It's a fun social thing to do. Like with my daughter." (Hugo)

In summary, consumers in the fourth cluster tended to be content with their lives and were not seeking substantial change. They were happy to share their consumption experiences, and it almost seemed as if they welcomed the opportunity to relive the particular event. Following even a highly impulsive shopping spree which they were open and comfortable to admit was not met with any reluctance or regret, unlike in the case of members of the first cluster. Each activity was largely self-contained, and the cycles only pertained to the variation between abstinence and occasional splurges. In contrast to earlier groups, there was almost no contemplation before and after making a purchase, which placed less emphasis on the pre- and post-acquisition periods. Their behaviour was often highly impulsive, with some elements of conspicuousness that were more internally oriented. They also found their whole experience rewarding enough to be considered therapeutic.

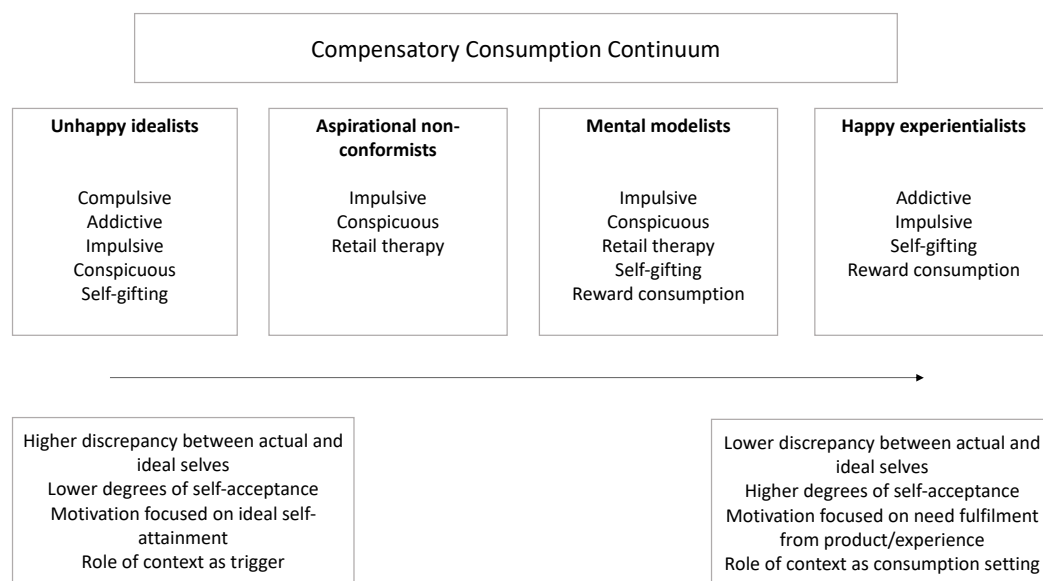
The behaviours of these consumers are particularly interesting from a compensatory consumption standpoint, in that they confirm the importance of taking a holistic perspective to capture the consumer

lifeworld rather than focusing on a few sporadic behavioural engagements taken out of context. These points will be revisited and further explored in Chapter 7.

6-B.5. Compensatory continuum for the four consumer profiles

The above section explored the compensatory continuum in detail across each of the four consumer clusters. Figure 6.1 presents a summary of the different types of compensatory consumption forms that prevailed in the case of the different consumer types.

FIGURE 6.1. The prevalence of compensatory consumption across the four consumer types.



As portrayed in Figure 6.1, the widest range of compensatory tendencies was represented by the first group of unhappy idealists, whose behaviours captured addictive, impulsive and even compulsive compartments, with occasional conspicuous and therapeutic elements. Compensatory cycles were initiated by the combined force of enduring predispositions, triggers and motivations. Context was relevant throughout the entire consumption process, with new compensatory cycles frequently initiated by contextual cues and anticipated or actual social encounters that brought relevant insecurities into awareness. Given their primary motivation to achieve their highly unattainable ideal self which they tried to address via the consumption of goods and services, these consumers experienced the least need satisfaction, which in turn resulted in frequent and cyclical compensatory relapses.

The second cluster of aspirational non-conformists portrayed a more limited array of compensatory engagements, representing a qualitative departure from the first group. Their primary motivation was associated with pursuing an aspirational consumer identity that was largely driven by relevant consumer trends and uniqueness. Despite their general posture as non-consumers, compensatory consumption

occurred on occasion predominantly capturing conspicuous and impulsive tendencies. Context, with particular attention to travels and special events, was relevant in that it enabled participants to secure unique and non-mainstream possessions with a special story. Consumers in this cluster achieved at least partial and sometimes full need satisfaction, and experienced limited or no follow-up regret.

The third cluster of mental modelists represented the least amount of compensatory engagements. They were content with themselves and did not envision substantial changes in their consumer identity to achieve an ideal or aspirational self. Their compensatory engagements occurred mostly in response to transient contextual triggers – such as a positive or a negative short-term emotional state – that encouraged instances of reward shopping and retail therapy, or an occasional impulsive encounter. Importantly, they were comfortable admitting and owning up to their occasional ‘slips’ in their consumption that swayed them away from rational comportments and – when necessary – identified steps to avoid them in the future.

Finally, the fourth cluster of happy experientialists in a way represents the most unique group of consumers. They are high in identity congruence as well as self-acceptance, do not chase ideals, and experience no regret or remorse following any consumption event, even more impulsive ones. In this sense, they do not compensate for any internal insecurity or transient contextual cue and tend to compose the group who participate in consumer society the least. Instead, their compensatory tendencies are driven by their motivation to escape from their highly controlled everyday environments, by pursuing a cherished experience. When describing their occasionally compensatory encounters, they seem to appreciate the process the most, without much consideration for the actual outcome of consumer good or service. Consequently, their need satisfaction is not necessarily driven by products but rather by the process of the consumer experience.

Foreseeing the extent of overlap between compensatory and compromisory engagements, the following section will discuss the final research question pertaining to the role of compromise in compensatory consumption, followed by a synthesis offered to capture the interrelations between the two concepts.

6-C. The role of compromise in the everyday life of consumers

The proposed models in Figures 2.1 (pp. 44) and 2.2 (pp. 46) in Chapter 2 conceptualised compromise as a concept that represents a qualitative departure from compensatory consumption in important ways. First, compromising consumers tend to be able to identify a need they wish to satisfy more so than compensatory consumers (that is they show higher levels of consciousness). Second, in comparison to the compensatory consumption process, compromise is more likely to entail higher levels of rationality and conscious deliberation. Finally, in contrast with the cyclical nature of compensatory consumption, compromisory engagements tend to be more independent and self-contained events. In the present section I will explore these propositions empirically, based on the results from the

interviews. To reiterate from Chapter 2 the difference between market- versus consumer-driven compromise building on Tosdal (1940)'s earlier work, market-driven compromises occur when the most desired choice is unavailable (i.e. out-of-stock) or the decision is overly complex and poses too many competing options for the consumer. Alternatively, consumer-driven compromise captures situations when the consumer either has unrealistic expectations or unlimited wants (i.e. wants it all) or is unaware of the true underlying needs and desires that initiate the behaviour in the first place.

Compromise as a general concept

Being a relatively unexplored subject, it is relevant to review the first impressions of consumers upon hearing the term 'compromise', even if it does not necessarily relate to consumption per se. As a general observation, participants tended to make social and relational associations that were unrelated to their consumption. Furthermore, compromise for most participants was linked with being in a committed relationship, making sacrifices for the sake of family and children, and generally not being able to do what one may otherwise desire. The following quotes provide a few examples to demonstrate this trend.

"Do I compromise? I think relationships are all about compromise. But my last relationship was not, it was all about one party taking and me giving, and when I was hoping for something there was nothing there. So I believe friendship, I think life is a lot about compromise. Now I think a lot of successful people would say no, it's not. It's about getting to the top, and you read about Steve Jobs, very successful people, like investment bankers. Of course I've been in the investment side. And you know my ex, you know, there's no compromise. So it's really, people don't compromise as much to be honest. It's entitlement. It's almost like they feel they're entitled to this. They feel... I think in general there has to be some kind of compromise. Because you can't always feel, when I look at things like how would I like it. And so if I wouldn't like that so I wouldn't do that to them." (Peter)

"Marriage. Trade-off. When you take something, you give something. And you find that some people can't do that." (Fanny)

Compromise... I'm married, that's what I do every day (Laugh). In French a compromis, yeah it has the same meaning as in English." (Petra)

"Compromise is, you have to give up stuff in order to get stuff, but what you often give up is more than what you get. I don't know, I think compromise, I don't think I had a lot of experiences of positive compromise. I think I've had more experience of independence, and compromise negative, brought less than what I wanted to. I compromised, I wanted this, but I gave into that. Like a guy, like a job, like I wanted this, but I gave in, I compromised, I took something less, and it just didn't work out. A compromise for me has not always been positive." (Florence)

A further observation should be made early on given its relevance for the overall discussion on compromise. In particular, when comparing direct and indirect consumer reflections, a similar duality emerged as in the case of general and compensatory consumption. As emphasised in earlier chapters, in response to direct questioning about consumer tendencies and profiles, the majority of participants considered their consumption to be largely utilitarian, need-based and free of compromise. In this vein, when asked to define and contemplate about compromise in a direct fashion, most consumers seemed highly rational and explicit, yielding to an overall consensus that compromise was negative and should be avoided. In contrast, throughout the consumer stories where compromisory engagements were more

indirect and implied, information concerning compromise also became richer and more diverse, presenting a more complex and comprehensive picture.

In the next section, I turn to exploring compromise within the realm of consumption.

Compromise in consumption

Similarly to the discussions of the previous research questions, the current section will be explored separately by the four consumer clusters to understand the extent to which compromise prevails in the different consumer types. This is particularly important as brief reflections to compromisory engagements were already made in earlier sections, which need to be followed up more extensively. For structural guidance, the four compromisory types as highlighted in Figure 2.2 (pp. 46) will be used to map corresponding behaviours across participants in the four clusters, with discussions separating compensatory consumption, consumer- and market-driven compromises, and finally utility optimisation. In addition to presenting an overall review, the current section will be used to ultimately synthesise compromise across the four consumer types and assess the extent to which the proposed models in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 hold in light of the current findings.

6-C.1. Consumer cluster 1: Unhappy idealists

As highlighted in earlier parts of this thesis, the unhappy idealists represented the highest prevalence and widest array of compensatory engagements, making this cluster the most prominent among the four consumption options. Their compensatory behaviours were not conscious nor rational, and they tended to engage in extensive rationalisation when recounting their experiences. Understandably, considering the extent of their predominantly compensatory comportments, members of this group were not likely to experience utility optimisation, not even in their regular non-compensatory engagements.

Compromise in the case of this group was relatively sporadic and was most prevalent in consumer-driven forms that manifested itself in certain specific ways. Importantly, compromisory engagements often coincided with general instances of compensatory consumption, presenting different levels of contemplation. For instance, some consumers engaged in compromise to establish a brand status quo that in turn encouraged them to refrain from ‘any’ consumption and when faced with a financial constraint, hold out for more desirable purchases. As an example, Flavia would not pursue non-branded items for herself, as she would not be ‘caught dead’, as she says, in GAP jeans or own merchandise perceived by her as suboptimal.

“I like really nice stuff. I don’t like to buy garbagy stuff. If I’m gonna buy, I’m gonna buy really good stuff. Otherwise I just won’t buy it. A little bit of my problem here because I’m not working is you know, I feel bad about, you know, I used to buy more nice stuff more frequently because I was working and earning, and here I’m doing stuff but I’m just not earning, so it’s like I’m not able to do the kind of shopping that I really love, I can do more window shopping than anything else and more just day to day practical stuff.” (Flavia)

In a similar attempt to identify a standard threshold, Pamela would limit herself to buying clothes considered acceptable to uphold certain perceived social standards and expectations. In this vein, these consumers were willing to pay a price premium for an item in order to achieve higher visibility and social recognition, while ultimately pursuing the products for compensatory purposes to address low self-confidence.

Furthermore, consumers also established certain guidelines for their consumption in order to address enduring physical insecurities. Hannah, for instance, would stay away from small boutiques as she would anticipate not finding anything suitable which would consequently make her feel down.

“I really like clothing stores, probably because I’m also a woman, but mostly the bigger ones. I don’t like small boutiques. Probably part of the reason is that the small boutiques have smaller sizes, and I suppose I don’t bother going in because most likely I would not find anything for myself. So the larger stores have more of a range of sizes, and I am more likely to find something for myself. [...] I have favourite shops, where I can find out of practical considerations things that would fit me and suit me. And these are good mid-range in terms of price. And it is good because they are accountable. If they say that they have a particular size, it will be that size, not something completely different.” (Hannah)

In this sense, Hannah compromised to avoid anticipated negative consequences. As an additional form of compromise, Hannah often chose to pursue ‘safe’ items like an accessory for herself or a gift for her children instead of a piece of clothing for herself, knowing that those would be more likely to give her immediate gratification. Paulo and Flora both refrained from shopping when they considered themselves overweight, trying to prevent feeling suboptimal.

Finally, consumers often engaged in compromisory behaviours to address financial constraints. For instance, while Pamela would ideally desire Michael Kors as her standard purchase, she realised her financial limitations and opted for occasional Guess merchandise as a more attainable alternative. As another example, knowing that her financial constraints prevented her from participating in consumer society to the desired extent, Flavia reverted to window shopping as a form of consumer-driven compromise. As she was unable to make actual purchases as frequently as she would have liked, window-shopping gave her a sense of participation in consumer society, giving her the confirmation that she could buy a particular product if she really wanted to. She would also hold out for making high-end purchases in Duty Free shops and during travels, where she could also more easily justify her behaviour.

“Yeah. I’d rather wait, and maybe. Like if this is too expensive, but there is a similar one, but it’s, no I don’t get it. Because I would regret. So I would prefer thinking that this month I can’t, so maybe I’ll save a little bit for that, and I’ll come back for that. But I prefer to wait. Yes, because the rare times when I’ve gone for the maybe similar but not, then that’s the type of buys that I regret. It’s like, shit I could have waited a month and then I had the real thing, like the one that I wanted, not the other one.” (Petra)

Along these lines, Flora noted not going on holidays, unlike her friends, which – in her view – should allow her to justify higher spending in other domains. In addition, although she mentioned setting a particular threshold for her purchases, she rationalised higher values by not having to care for a family and by depending solely on herself.

“Well, in that moment, I can buy that Chanel handbag. But like if I was working, I mean after a few months, I could buy it. I would buy it. Just because it’s a one off. And it’s not like I have 10 thousand Chanel handbags.

It's just something like, you know, one thing. You know, honestly, probably I wouldn't buy it, because it's just such a waste. I think my, for me maximum a thousand euros. I wouldn't spend more than 1000 euros on a handbag. So yes, that's it. For me, when I think of compromise, it's like sacrificing something. And honestly, if I'm really honest, and I don't want to sound arrogant, but when I'm earning an income, it's in the 6 digits, so I'm fortunate, and since I don't have a family to support, I don't have, I'm not that price sensitive. If I want something, or if I want to go on holiday like in Peru or Nepal, I would just do it. And if I go past a store and I see a beautiful dress, I go and I just buy it. It's an impulsive purchase, but usually I don't have any constraints. And that's a blessing, because It's not, I'm not a typical, I wouldn't say I'm like, I wouldn't say I'm like quite fortunate, well, I've earned that. But yeah, in that sense I'm very fortunate." (Flora)

Although for the most part consumers did not engage in market-driven compromises and went to great length to achieve something they set their heart on regardless of availability in their home markets, some members like Hannah and Heidi reflected upon occasional supply limitations associated with restrictions to finding the right size or an otherwise suitable outfit. Petra also mentioned feeling more at ease shopping in her Swiss home where she was more able to relate to staff and find interesting items. Pamela's quote above also represents an example for this, involving her dad's international German acquaintance to obtain a desired product that was unavailable at her home. These stories confirm that market restrictions often coincide with consumers' addictive and compulsive compensatory tendencies, driving them to go to great length to pursue a product they feel they really need to have.

The above observations confirm that the behaviours of the first cluster were predominantly compensatory in orientation, with some instances of consumer- and to a lesser extent market-driven compromise, often occurring within a compensatory cycle. Overall, compensatory consumption exerted the largest influence on their comportments, perpetually operating in the back of their mind guiding the vast majority of their consumption, with occasional compromises appearing along the way. Consequently, utility optimisation was unlikely, as the underlying need to be addressed was highly unattainable, often resulting in new compensatory cycles.

6-C.2. Consumer cluster 2: Aspirational non-conformists

In comparison to the first consumer cluster, aspirational non-conformists were less likely to engage in compensatory consumption as they generally operated at higher levels of rationality. At the same time, they were not necessarily aware of the underlying need or drive to approximate their aspirational identity behind their actions, suggesting lower levels of consciousness that lead to compromisory engagements. As will be demonstrated in this section, compensation continued to operate in the background, but compromise became the dominant force behind the majority of consumer engagements.

Participants in this group mentioned various *consumer trends* that contributed to their consumption shift mentioned above and in turn served as a motivation driving their compromisory consumption. Amongst these trends, several consumers recalled the popular book by Marie Kondo '*The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organising*' which they viewed as highly influential to their behaviour.

"Another thing through mindfulness that I understood about myself, how important it is to have a clean space, and Feng Shui, and for instance whenever I see my closet it makes me understand the need to tidy up, but

also, I don't allow myself, I don't feel good about buying something new unless I give away something I don't wear, something that I don't wear, unless I'm really attached and those clothes make me feel good, or they are a special memory you know? So actually, there is, like, there is a store in Paris, where you can leave your clothes, if it is a brand, and they sell it for you. Or I would take them back home. So then I feel good, and then I allow myself to buy maybe one item. [...] There's this Japanese woman, you know this book, the *Art of Decluttering* or something, it's very famous, it's a best seller. It's like, yeah. It's the bible of decluttering. So I'm all into decluttering. Because I have a small space, and I don't like having, buying things for the sake of buying.” (Fay)

Fay mentions several notions in her excerpt, including the trend of decluttering, having clean space, not being comfortable introducing a new item unless giving something away, as well as compromising for her relatively small space. Fanny also referred to the same book and its impact on her. She noted that it made sense to her, she cared a lot about *sustainability* and the environment, and the messages in this book presented a good fit with her overall ideologies.

“I've been pretty good with downsizing. I started before the move. There is this trend of minimalism, Marie Kondo, Whatever. Yeah the idea of not getting rid of stuff but instead keeping stuff, was interesting. You know what she does? She says, don't ask yourself what should I discard, ask yourself what I should keep. I didn't read it, I just read the reviews. But it seems interesting. [...] I normally, when I'm home, YouTube is always on, and it just plays. Videos play, and I listen. A young girl, because I was watching something, and it went, because it's automatic, like a playlist, so it went on to the minimalism, like Kondo, and blah blah, and it hit me, it makes sense, why do we have to keep more, buy more. And really, after the decluttering, it felt what? Relaxing? Caring less, really makes use of what we have. For me really it's clothing and makeup.” (Fanny)

In line with her sustainable perspectives, on another occasion, Fanny raised concerns about ever having a house with a pool. She considered pools a waste of water and energy, and generally would aspire to stay away from such luxuries. Consumers raised further concerns regarding global consumption patterns with which they disagreed and that made them uncomfortable. Helena, for instance, voiced her discontent about the materials used in many consumer goods.

“I sometimes watch, like Zara or Mango, 90% of the things are plastic, viscose is still the better scenario, but mostly it's the polyamide. And of course, I am not the target consumer group, it's clear. But in Budapest it is really difficult to find the kind of quality. It's mostly the fast fashion type of stores that remain. So in England I am better able to find the things that I am looking for. And I like bio things in general. For my skin the other materials are not feeling well.” (Helena)

Beyond material goods and merchandise, consumers took pride in not having excess food in the house and trying to embrace decluttering perspectives in as many areas in their lives as possible. Helena brought up a particularly interesting pattern she noticed in her own behaviour. She said that in the past, her family used to travel with large suitcases, which made her feel uncomfortable. She attributed her ability to finally changing her undesirable habit to the policies of low-cost airlines, when they began restricting luggage space. She noted that it made the overall process of planning for the trip much more pleasant and easier to handle.

“With travel, I must say that the best decision the airliners could make is that you can only take a small luggage. It helps me a lot. I used to travel with very large bags. Now I travel very light. I don't feel that I need to take a lot with me. So I always think ahead of time carefully what I need, and I take things that are good for every occasions. And there is no room for much contemplation, it's great. I really like that.” (Helena)

It is interesting to see that a constraint that normally carries negative connotations may be experienced in an unexpectedly positive fashion by consumers. In Helena's case, the added value of restricting her choices and simplifying her travel shifted the focus from constraint to personal benefit.

Consumers often talked about possessions that carried a *special story* and were also quite happy to share their history with these items. Fay talked about a few particular objects in her house (a rug and a vase), and a piece of jewellery.

“So when I think about some of my special possessions... This rug I bought in Bucharest, it's hand-made and from silk, you touch and it's really. I was visiting the factory, and I was really impressed by the beautiful rugs. And I thought, it would be nice to own one, I was living in London. And so I chose that one. And I took it back with me. And moved back with it. And I've had it I don't know, at least 18-19 years. And there's also a vase, from my hometown, also hand made. I like the blue, I guess. And it can't be found any more, it's like antique in a way. That's very precious to me. And that's a ring which I am wearing now, which is white gold and I bought it in Firenze from the bridge. And so since I don't buy myself precious jewellery every day, and I like the ring very much.” (Fay)

This excerpt confirms that consumers tend to focus on special items that in turn justify their compromise and enable them to sway away from their otherwise non-consumerist posture and preferences. Fanny spoke passionately about her cardigan; the same one she was worried about wearing to make sure it would not become too used or destroyed.

“My cardigan. I remember where I bought it. It wasn't online, because the store was near our house, so I would pass by the window. I saw the cardigan, but as they mostly sell pyjamas and home wear, I didn't think there would be something I could use. But that one I loved. I was pregnant at the time, and I thought I will buy it and I will put it on when I go to give birth. And I did. And I have a picture with my cardigan right after my water broke. I took a shower, I put on my cardigan, my sister took a picture of my husband, my daughter and me, and I never thought I would love a piece of clothing so much. It's not my most precious item, but I love it. It was on me when I gave birth. Not on me, but you see my point.” (Fanny)

Fanny reflected upon her special attachment to her cardigan despite her otherwise very calculating and project-based approach to consumption. Similarly, Helena talked about her admiration for small markets, antiques, and items that were unique. She remodelled several homes and always found a place to host her favourite possessions. Whenever entertaining visitors, she enjoys telling them about the unique story of each item. She appreciates receiving compliments on her surrounding, taste and unique material collection.

“I love little markets. We recently went to Vienna to a small market and we bought a large mirror. But this is also, you keep buying things over your life, you select them, and the expectation level keeps getting higher and higher. So now there are only a few items that I would even consider buying, because I really find it in-dismissible. We wouldn't choose many things anymore as we are very selective. And that changed a lot over the years. [...] I could totally fall in love with some items. We bought this secessionist cupboard. It's beautiful. And I would prefer to design the apartment another way, but I cannot. We have had a long enough life and we collected certain items, it would be silly to part with them. We like them and all, but sometimes you want something different. But at the same time, it's nice that we have these objects. And you can mix them with minimalist design.” (Helena)

These stories are particularly interesting in comparison to the other consumer groups. Once we complete the review of all four clusters, it will become clear that consumers seldom establish special connections and attachment to their possessions. When asked what would happen if their house burnt down, most consumers would choose to rescue their photographs, phones or computers. However, in the case of the current group, in line with their mission to continuously work on their aspirational identity project, certain possessions are espoused with special meaning, which in turn helps their quest for uniqueness and justification to consume.

In terms of motivations, participants in the current group voiced a strong *desire to be unique*, which manifested itself in being different from the mainstream, having a preference for distinct items, and having certain key possessions that make a statement as opposed to merely serving a utilitarian purpose. For instance, Fay mentioned wanting to have a watch, but not as a time piece but more as a statement piece.

“Like two or three months ago, I met this woman at a business networking event. And she had this cool watch, a Swiss watch, and I asked her where she bought it. But each time I go and look and, in the windows, and there is so much choice, I don't know which one to buy, like when people say Swiss watch, what do they mean. I would like something that it should be a statement, that I could wear with a dress, so I think more than money, it's about too much choice and not knowing how to narrow it down.” (Fay)

Fay also talked about not wanting to settle for mainstream brands, as those were too common, and it was easy to encounter someone on the street wearing the same outfit. She preferred owning and wearing things that were unique and different, often irrespective of the brand or the price.

“And so I like that I can do it in the comfort of my living room, you know, look at the options, and these are really nice brands, not Zara or something you see on somebody else, so it's very unique, and you can send it back if you don't like it. [...] I prefer to shop when I travel to places, because I don't, I guess I don't like buying in Paris, because it happened to me that I bought something, for instance I used to shop in Zara, but I stopped two years ago, three years ago. And then I'm wearing this nice top, and I'm going down the street, and there's a lady coming just wearing the same top, and so I'm like, when I travel, for instance when I go to Italy, and I like Italian fashion, like Florence, or when I go to New York, I end up buying something, and so I'll bring back like a couple of items when I travel. [...] Also, those brands that I buy, that nobody knows about them, they are not famous brands like Gucci or anything. But the brand that I like most, they're so cool, and it's like very unique style, and it's not really a well-known brand. It's not like I care, I would say, and the prices are the same if you go to a boutique, right?” (Fay)

As demonstrated in the above section, the most important considerations during the pre-acquisition stage for members of this group entailed a quest towards an aspirational identity, which brought upon a multitude of compromises, particularly considering their otherwise non-consumerist ideologies. This involved certain meaningful events and time periods in their history, relevant consumer trends, key possessions with an interesting story, and a general need for uniqueness. These consumers made choices that were in line with how they wanted to see themselves and how they wanted to be seen by others, and this is where the compensatory element still emerged throughout their stories.

In conclusion, the majority of consumption for this group can be viewed as compromisory, as any act made them sway from their otherwise non-consumerist posture. For instance, both Fay and Helena talked about difficulties finding unique items with a special story, and hence preferred to shop while traveling, where securing such items was more likely. Further emphasising the unique collection of possessions these consumers were ultimately seeking, and to avoid large shopping centres that made them feel uneasy, they preferred to shop in small boutiques, unique markets, or online but nonetheless distinctive outlets.

In summary, the behaviour of the aspirational non-conformists represented less compensatory and more compromisory tendencies, capturing predominantly consumer-driven forms. Furthermore, although members of this group achieved utility optimisation in the sense of complete need satisfaction to some extent, given the fluidity of their aspirational identity, this was relatively short lived, and

resulted in frequent re-evaluation and adjustment in response to changing consumer trends. Similarly to the first group, compensation and compromise often occurred simultaneously, although given the higher levels of rationality of these consumers, compensatory tendencies operated more in the background, while compromisory ones appeared more in the foreground, hence taking part in consumer-driven compromise. Although they were more self-accepting, they continued to compensate for the gap between their actual and aspirational identity, while compromising with the choice of outlet, the types of products, and in general with the consumption itself.

6-C.3. Consumer cluster 3: Mental modelists

The third cluster of mental modelists incorporated consumers who were qualitatively different from the first two groups in that they were not motivated by pursuing an ideal or aspirational self, but instead were quite content with themselves as they were. In their consumption, they established certain mental models to guide them in their endeavours, and to also ensure that they refrained from compensatory and in particular impulsive engagements as much as possible. In this sense they were similar to the second group of aspirational non-conformists in that they preferred to not consume unless they were certain of the satisfaction derived from their purchase or consumer experience. This was also in line with their highly rational and conscious levels of operation, making utility-optimisation the most representative form of consumption. For these consumers, the primary motivation driving consumption focused on optimising the value represented by the consumption activity, in order to secure the best option to offset the investment.

In terms of consumer-driven compromises, several participants reverted to paying a price premium, as demonstrated in Fatima's quote below. She admitted to not buying the cheapest option when deciding between different choices, using this compromisory mental model to maximise the benefits derived from the ultimate selection.

When it comes to buying things, I suppose most people do that. Like they never take the option that is the least expensive, try to find something in the middle. I suppose most people do that. Compromise... It depends. (Fatima)

While this example reflects a market-driven compromise in that it addresses with the overabundance of choice in market offerings, Fatima employed a consumer-driven compromise to focus on price as a shortcut for quality to help her confirm that she made the right choice. As another example, Fatima also compromised by getting a Mac rather than a PC, as she kept all her life's work on her computer and perceived reliability gave her a sense of comfort.

"I told you that now I am trying to go for things that should last longer. Yeah, that is it. Shoes that are more expensive, and I try to take care of, and I took care of my computer after it died a week before my exams... But try to take care of things. So I chose to take a Mac, because I can put my work, my life is on it. Took the less expensive option, but still, it's a Mac." (Fatima)

Along these lines, Peter adopted a price-based compromise in his food shopping, and would consistently buy organic produce, despite the higher price.

“Oh yeah, relating to consumption, I don’t like go, I don’t like buy the expensive chicken so I buy the cheap vegetables to compromise from a budget perspective, you know what I mean? No. I don’t...” (Peter)

Finally, Francesca’s quote represents her tendency to compromise and stay away from cheap items as she considered these options to be inferior and more expensive in the long run.

“Because I like to be 100% sure of what I buy. I don’t like to make a compromise, buy cheap things. It’s more expensive afterwards. It’s... Sometimes I see my friends buying a lot, like basics and it’s cheap, and they say, maybe she’s right, you know, I should do it, but when I try it on, I see that I can’t. I just can’t. It is something, maybe with age, that it happened, that I really can’t make myself buy something. You know, I prefer to have less, but things I appreciate.” (Francesca)

The role of children presented another notable trend in consumer-driven compromise. For instance, in the case of Phoebe, although she may have been in the market to buy something for herself, she sometimes felt disappointed by not having found anything interesting, and in order to optimise and justify her time, she often ended up buying something for her kids.

“If they need something, then that is basically what I have my energy and time for that only. But usually it’s the other way around. I go to stores that have both adult and kid stuff, and many times what happens is that I go into a store, like Zara, I look around, and perhaps am a bit disappointed by looking around and not finding anything, and then I go over to the kids’ section and look around for the kids. I usually find something there, and I know that they will be happy. Especially my daughter. And I think, ok, I couldn’t find anything for myself, but if I find something for her then I think cool, at least I found something for her. That makes me happy, and at least it wasn’t a waste.” (Phoebe)

Interestingly, consumers were also more forgiving of occasional impulsive engagements when concerning their children.

Consumers also compromised in an attempt to cope with some personal shortcomings like lack of confidence. Francine, for instance, tended to solicit advice from a close friend whom she looked up to for guidance in style. As an interesting pattern, she noted that when she liked a particular item, she often bought several of the same product in different colours. This pattern can also be viewed as a ‘mental model’ for Francine, helping her reduce the complexity of the search and the selection, and benefit from the comfort of ‘tried and tested’ solutions. Finally, the last segment of Francine’s quote provides further support for her tendency to seek out external advice from others. She also noted frequently shopping with her friends and often ending up with the same clothes.

“I like shopping. Yeah... It’s always cool to see new things. And being with my friend. My friend with whom I go shopping is a fashion designer. When I go with her, it’s like ‘no, you don’t! Yes, that’s great! No, not that one’. When I like something, she often says ‘no, you can’t’. So it’s good. And sometimes she is straight. When she sees how I could be. How I, which clothes I buy. She’s just great. She’s very helpful. [...] My closet I organise well, but... When I love some clothes, then I buy it in like all colours. That’s why it’s easy to organise my closet. I have the same jeans in three four colours. Because it’s always the same. The shades are different, but the rest is the same. The same T-shirts, same trousers, just different colours.” (Francine)

Holly’s lack of purchase confidence also surfaced repeatedly throughout her stories. She frequently compared herself with her sister, whose affirmative and confident style at times made her feel overshadowed. She claimed to have a relatively consistent preference for the same – as she referred to ‘safe’ – styles and colours in her wardrobe that were also reflected in her general purchase profile. She voiced her desire to experiment and be more courageous in her wardrobe selection. There was a

particularly interesting twist in her story when she began to describe her experiences visiting second-hand stores.

“This is where I feel more adventurous, I feel more willing to try and buy different things. You know, colours... Bright colours, not just black, white or grey. And styles too, those that are not so obviously me. The clothes here are cheap, so even if I don’t like it, or don’t end up using it, it’s ok to try. And sometimes I find some interesting pieces. So yeah, either here, or from my sister. My sister has a more colourful taste and she buys me clothes sometimes for my birthday or something. I like to try new things.” (Holly)

As apparent from the interview excerpt above, Holly was willing to take more risks and be bolder when the stakes (i.e. cost of merchandise) were lower, and the likelihood of negative consequences – such as guilt, remorse or regret – were minimised. In other words, the reduced investment and consequently lower perceived risks presented her with a sense of safety to experiment with more unusual, bolder and more extravagant choices. In this sense, she compromised by turning to safer options of second-hand stores to minimise the occurrence of follow-up regret.

There were some compromisory engagements that entailed market-driven aspects, but that ended up more being closely linked with consumer-driven compromise, particularly as consumers were quite calculating and frugal with their spending. Peter shared a compromisory experience to manage the multitude of choice in terms of his activities and identify those on which he was willing to spend money. In particular, he recalled that in the past he used to go out to dinner with his son. As these experiences no longer gave him a justifiable extent of satisfaction, he preferred to discontinue and instead spend money on more enjoyable and valuable expenditures, such as private tennis lessons. In a way he compromised for the lack of continued enjoyment and chose to identify an alternative experience that – in comparison – provided him with greater satisfaction.

“Do I compromise? Do I not do certain things to do other things? I mean, for example. I pay for tennis lessons for private tennis lessons for myself and Frederick. It costs money. So before we used to play tennis, we used to go out to dinner. Now we don’t go out to dinner. So I could say well, I’m compromising by using that money to pay for tennis lessons to do that thing. But you know, would it make a big difference in my life finally if we went out, continued to go out? No. It wouldn’t. I think the reason is because my son eats a mile a minute, and I’m paying, and in three minutes it’s finished, and I’m still eating, and there’s probably not much talk about stuff like... So I don’t, it’s that, I just don’t feel that, I don’t know where I... From a consumption perspective, since I consume so little, there’s not much, I don’t think I save a lot if I buy this, instead of buying that. Because I just don’t buy a lot. I don’t know what other people tell you about compromise... It’s more on a personal level.” (Peter)

Some consumers were also influenced by external considerations such as the class society in the case of Peter, the French glamour in the case of Francesca, or the US high-society expectations in the case of Phoebe. In order to fit their greater context, these consumers often engaged in compromise by adjusting their otherwise more modest or simplistic styles. For these consumers, social situations at times triggered certain levels of discomfort, giving rise to compromisory and in particular conspicuous consumption related to status. For instance, although generally satisfied with his life, Peter voiced a sense of inadequacy when thinking about his greater societal context or when comparing himself to members of his social circle whom he perceived to be more accomplished. In light of his multiple university degrees from prestigious institutions, he felt that he could have done better in his life,

referring to a certain extent of 'unfulfilled potential'. To compromise for this, Peter often sought 'visible' items. For instance, when talking about his son's schooling, he made repeated reference to a 'class society' that seemed to drive him towards purchases that signalled conspicuous consumption tendencies.

"When I pick up my son from the school, if I'm wearing an old pair of shorts or jeans, I'll actually change into a nicer pair of jeans just to pick him up. Because I have to get out of the car sometimes and go and so I'll be visible interacting with people. [...] Well, I care about, I guess it's more of a, it's unconscious in that it's a reflection on my son, if I go in with an I don't give a shit attitude. And I also know that people treat others differently, you know, if they have a perception that for some reason you maybe are of different social class, they will treat you better." (Peter)

In his quote Peter revealed behaving in a certain way because he expected 'to be visible and to interact with people', making him sensitive to using products perceived as acceptable by his surroundings. He also would emphasise 'dressing the part' when going out with his friends or going on a date where he felt the need to 'make an effort' to project a certain image. The quote below represents well the difference between personal or inconspicuous versus external or conspicuous usage of material items, which was rather distinct in the case of Peter.

"A dress shirt, I haven't bought a dress shirt like in two years. And I don't use dress shirts. You know, if I were dating, I would need different dress shirts to go outside. But I don't go out all that much at all. At home I wear shorts and a jumper around the house. I only go to a couple of places. You know what I mean? And that's in part, nobody's gonna see it, why am I going to buy anything nice? I mean I buy, but it's not a name brand, or not a luxury brand. I'm not gonna buy a Hugo Boss sweater to wear around the house. I'm gonna buy a Hugo Boss shirt if I wear it out with my friends. Or wear it on a date. I will wear nice clothes when I date. As a practicality, I'm not dating, so the pressure is off." (Peter)

Importantly, what may initially start out as a compromise may turn into a mental model, and become a regular purchase, activity, or possession. Peter, for instance, acquired a luxury car and designer shirts in order to fit with the perceived expectations of his context, which could be considered conspicuous consumption. Over time, however, these behaviours turned into regular habits for him, and he reflected upon these possessions emphasising comfort, reliability and fit. This also illustrates that when viewed in their lifeworld, consumption experiences become quite dynamic and can evolve over time in meaningful ways.

In summary, the most prevalent form of consumption amongst the compensatory and compromisory typologies for members of this cluster concerned utility optimisation, followed by consumer-driven compromises. In contrast with the earlier two consumer clusters, these participants were fully aware of the real need underlying their consumption, and hence their compromisory engagements were independent and self-standing events.

6-C.4. Consumer cluster 4: Happy experientialists

Given their high levels of identify congruence and self-acceptance, members of the fourth and final group of happy experientialists showed little need to engage themselves in compensatory consumption. In comparison to other groups, these individuals participated in consumption activities the least, and for the most part could be even characterised as non-consumers. In much of their regular consumption, they

were driven by utility optimisation, in order to achieve the highest satisfaction and return on investment. During these engagements they were highly conscious and acted out of rational considerations. Occasional compensatory comportments emerged that were driven by escape and distraction from their otherwise highly controlled daily lives. Although consumers tended to lose themselves during the acquisition stage of a particular compensatory activity, they otherwise remained highly conscious of their behaviours. Furthermore, as they placed the highest emphasis on the process of the consumption experience rather than the ultimate possession, they were likely to achieve at least partial satisfaction from the experience.

Consumers in this cluster established different ways to limit their spending in order to secure their own welfare or remain true to their preferences. Florence was reluctant to spend given her limited resources, Hugo given his general dislike of ‘owning stuff’, and Pedro given that he worked hard and realised how difficult it was to make money. Nonetheless, their behaviours demonstrated occasional deviations from their general posture that is interesting from the perspective of not only compensatory but also compromisory engagements. Florence, for instance, tended to be conscientious about her spending given her limited budget, but at the same time recognised that she could be impulsive on some occasions and spend more than desirable. As a compromise, she would always check her bank account before agreeing to go shopping to make sure she had sufficient funds to do so, or restricted her actual shopping to specific times when she travelled conferences.

“But because of my limited budget, I try not to... I don’t go shopping on a regular basis. So for that kind of thing, I wait until, it’s not even for sales. It’s more I wait until I go on my conferences. [...] But it’s not excessive, it’s very reasonable because my budget is small. So I’m a conscientious person about how much money I have. So it’s I come out pretty well, I don’t go, I always go over budget a little, but I don’t ever. I don’t die because of it.” (Florence)

Florence’s earlier example from above outlining her detailed shopping spree with her friend presents another good compromisory instance with elements of compensation. Hugo would also not consume on a regular basis and would be quite careful with his spending. He would only allow himself to let loose once the spending pressure built up, at which times he often engaged in impulsive sprees. Pedro would also set sensible limits for himself within which to navigate his wine or holiday expenditures.

Compromise... I do it all the time with wine. You know what I mean. We could have the best wine of Chateaux Lafitte, but you compromise with a cheaper bottle. I mean there are so many things where you have to compromise. You like to spend time with your family, but you still have to live, so you have to work. You kind of optimise the time you can spend with them. [...] I mean I compromise with the hotel I go to, you know there’s sometimes, there’s a lot nicer hotels but they cost 5 times as much, so we stay in cheaper hotels. Would I want to stay in another one? No. But sometimes there are nicer hotels right on the beach. (Pedro)

These above examples demonstrate that similarly to earlier groups, compensation and compromise often co-occurred exerting a combined influence within the same consumption engagement. Importantly, the simultaneous role of compensation and compromise only becomes apparent when taking into account the process, the context and underlying motivations that drive consumption, and would have been easily overlooked if examining the consumption act in isolation.

Some market-driven compromise also emerged in the case of this group, linked mostly with limited market supply. Consumers often recalled being frustrated with availabilities that made them settle for suboptimal choices.

“I hate shopping. Because maybe my size, there’s a lot of things that don’t fit, or I have to go to special places. You know, big department stores in the States work great. And in France these little boutiques, it’s just a pain.” (Florence)

Hugo also preferred to shop in the US considering the wider selection of merchandise which was highly restricted in his Hungarian home base. For both Florence and Hugo, making market-based compromises was viewed in a negative sense, often leading to suboptimal choices and decisions.

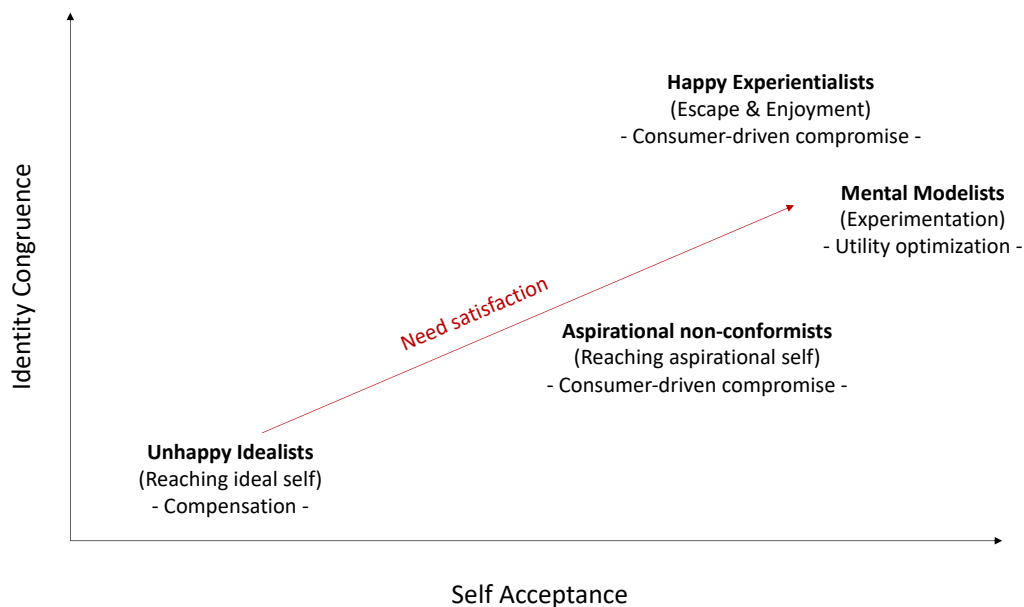
“Well, the selection actually sucks. Here the selection sucks. In the US it’s a lot better. Yeah. So you know I get frustrated, and after a while I’m like, Ok, I am taking these, but then I realised, well. I get frustrated, because I’m really sick of it. And then it happens. It just happens. And then I realise that I shouldn’t have even bought that. [...] When I take them home... I try them on, I’ll wear them, and I realise that I really can’t wear them. I try to get them off to my older son. My daughter takes some of them as well. Gives them to her boyfriend or something. And then eventually it’s time to go shopping again, eventually. Not that often though.” (Hugo)

In summary, consumers in the fourth cluster presented an interesting blend of highly impulsive engagements combined with a rational and calculative general consumer posture. Although several of the participants’ behaviours – when taken out of context – could be considered compensatory, once they are viewed in a way that is consistent with how they occur in their lifeworld, consumer-driven compromise seems a more appropriate way to describe these engagements. There were instances of market-driven compromise often linked with resource scarcity. Finally, utility optimisation was prevalent for this group, but mostly focusing on achieving satisfaction from the process of experiential pursuits as opposed to the possession itself.

6-C.5. Consumer compromise across the four consumer types

Summarising the above observations, Figure 6.2 presents a synthesis to capture the key differentiators that drive compensatory consumption across the four groups, including identity congruence between consumers’ ideal and actual selves; degree of consumers’ self-acceptance; and the key motivations underlying compensatory engagements, respectively. The red arrow represents need satisfaction.

FIGURE 6.2. Compensatory and compromisory engagements as a function of extent of identity-congruence, self-acceptance and motivation driving consumption engagements across the four consumer clusters.



As apparent from Figure 6.2, the first group of unhappy idealists consists of consumers who struggle with a large discrepancy between their ideal and actual selves and have a generally low degree of self-acceptance. They tend to engage in compensatory consumption as an attempt to approximate and reach their ideal self, and in turn achieve at least short-term gratification in order to feel better; mostly without success. Wishing to be different, they tend to fight and often reject their actual consumer identity, and when facing a discrepancy, place emphasis on being rational and need-based consumers. Most of their frustrations originate from persistent and enduring dissatisfactions and deep insecurities, influencing their consumption patterns across multiple domains. The behaviours of these consumers do not display elements of rationality, yet they tend to engage in extensive rationalisation, particularly once they realise the post-purchase experience of denial, regret and remorse. Given their lack of need satisfaction, new compensatory cycles emerge frequently.

The second group of aspirational non-conformists is represented by a set of aspirational consumers in pursuit of a unique identity. They espouse certain values in key domains that are specifically important for them, where they want to make sure to have a consistent consumer profile that is also evident to the outside world. They seem to possess a strong drive to be ‘known’ for something that they perceive as unique. They are quite happy with themselves especially in comparison to their earlier history and behaviours, but they nonetheless face a discrepancy between their actual and aspirational selves. They also care about others’ opinion in the sense of social confirmation and recognition, which often elicits conspicuous tendencies.

In the third consumer cluster of mental modelists, participants seldom think about their consumption per se, and when reflecting upon specific experiences, they seem to be more accepting

and content with their overall consumer identity. Given that much of their consumption is associated with a specific perceived need, these consumers regularly achieve need fulfilment, which also explains the periodic and isolated patterns characterising their consumption events. Their primary motivation beyond need fulfilment concerns experimentation, and they often look for their context for inspiration. They tend to be quite content with their purchases, do not engage in post-purchase rationalisation, and also do not experience denial or regret.

Finally, the fourth group of happy experientialists could be characterised by the highest degree of self-acceptance, which results in a substantially lower discrepancy between consumers' ideal and actual selves. These individuals represent an interesting blend of high consciousness, reason and even non-consumerism along with equally prevalent compensatory tendencies in certain key domains. Their compensatory consumption tends to be motivated by a desire to escape from their highly controlled day-to-day existence. Given the lack of remorse and regret, they also tend to display relatively limited rationalisation. Although generally speaking they could not be labelled as 'compensatory' consumers in the traditional sense, when considering certain domains and particular circumstances, they can exhibit several compensatory tendencies, including impulse buying, compulsive comportments and conspicuous consumption. Importantly, these behaviours are compensatory as they enable participants to escape and temporarily break away from their highly controlled daily existence, as opposed to making up for a personal insecurity.

The above section reviewed the different consumer profiles and their characteristics incorporating key dimensions that emerged throughout the interviews. The results confirmed that there is in fact a continuum of compensatory consumption. However, instead of assigning individuals to distinct behavioural categories, I proposed a conceptualisation that takes into account different consumer profiles, and in turn captures a range of compensatory behavioural types in a transversal fashion. As portrayed by the proposed model in Figure 6.1 (pp. 158), the key considerations included extent of identity congruence, degree of self-acceptance, key motivations and extent of need satisfaction. In the next section, I turn to revisiting and evaluating the conceptual models proposed in Chapter 2.

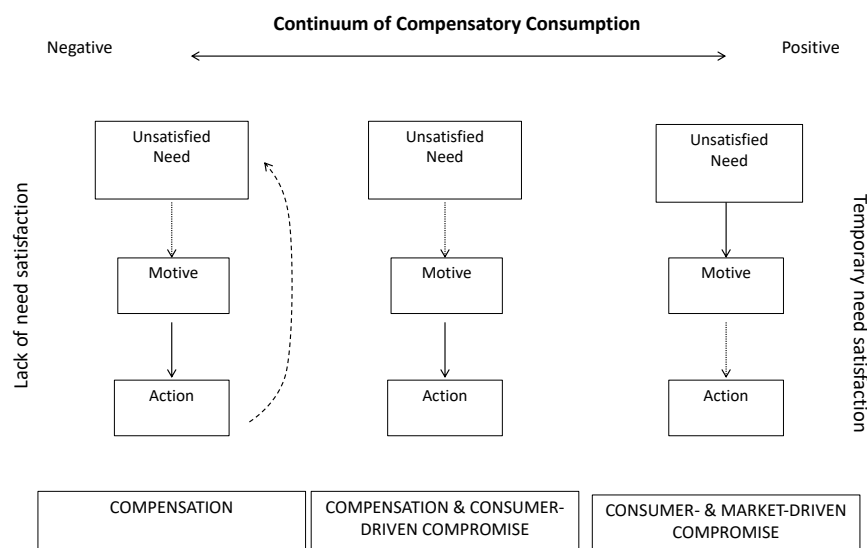
6-D. Revisiting the proposed conceptual frameworks from Chapter 2

Following the discussion of the four research questions, it becomes important to revisit the two conceptual frameworks proposed in Chapter 2 and see to what extent they hold in light of the findings across the four consumer types. In Figure 2.1 (pp 44), I applied the theoretical framework of need satisfaction offered by Gronmo (1988) to the compensatory consumption continuum (as summarised in Table 2.3, pp 38), bringing in parallel the need-motive inconsistency with the negative (left) side of compensatory consumption, and the motive-action inconsistency with the positive (right) side of compromisory consumption.

Based on the empirical findings from the present thesis, we can conclude that the separation between compensatory and compromisory engagements seem to hold, in line with Gronmo (1988)'s

original propositions. However, the framework in its present form as showcased in Figure 2.1 seems incomplete in two aspects. On the one hand, it fails to capture the situation of the second cluster of aspirational non-conformists, who represent a unique blend of compensation and compromise. While the majority of consumption for members of this group tends to represent consumer-driven compromise, the discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves underscored by their aspirational identity projects should be reflected, in that they tend to trigger compensatory comportments. Their behaviours are not cyclical, in contrast with their unhappy idealist counterparts, but their persistent pursuit of a desired consumer self does bring upon compensatory tendencies. On the other hand, the original model fails to encompass the full range of compromisory behaviours, as they emerged throughout the consumer stories across the four clusters. Given the inherent contrast between consumer-driven and market-driven compromises and their differential impact shaping consumer responses, a slightly adjusted model is proposed to reflect this distinction, as portrayed in Figure 6.3.

FIGURE 6.3. The revised framework applying Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction to the continuum of compensatory and compromisory consumption.



In addition, in the previous section, I discussed the prevalence of compromise in detail across the four consumer groups. It was clear from the descriptions that of the four options composed of compensatory consumption, consumer- and market-driven compromise and utility optimisation, different combinations prevailed in different consumer types, which were reflected in the descriptions above for each cluster. For the first group of unhappy idealists, compensatory consumption was most dominant, followed by consumer-driven and then market-driven compromises, with practically no representation of utility optimisation. In the second group of aspirational non-conformists, consumer-driven compromisory engagements were most representative, with some prevalence of compensatory consumption and more limited utility optimisation.

In the third group of mental modelists, highly conscious and rational forms of need satisfaction in the form of utility optimisation were most prevalent, with occasional instances of consumer-driven compromise and reward-based compensation. Finally, in the fourth group of happy experientialists, consumer-driven compromises were most dominant, with less prevalence of market-driven compromises and some instances of compensation driven by an external need for escape rather than a personal motivation. Despite some similarities in actual behavioural manifestations, the behaviour of these consumers could not be considered compensatory in the traditional sense when portrayed in their lifeworld, as they were not driven by identity incongruence and – particularly in comparison to the first group – captured conscious and relatively rational encounters.

These above conclusions are summarised in Figure 6.4, differentiating amongst the four consumer clusters as a function of high, medium and low occurrences of compensatory and compromisory behaviours and utility optimisation, respectively.

FIGURE 6.4. The prevalence of compensatory consumption, consumer- and market-driven compromise and utility optimisation in the four consumer clusters.

1. Unhappy idealists		2. Aspirational non-conformists	
Market-driven compromise	Utility optimisation	Market-driven compromise	Utility optimisation
Compensatory consumption	Consumer-driven compromise	Compensatory consumption	Consumer-driven compromise
3. Mental modelists		4. Happy experientialists	
Market-driven compromise	Utility optimisation	Market-driven compromise	Utility optimisation
Compensatory consumption	Consumer-driven compromise	Compensatory consumption	Consumer-driven compromise

	High
	Medium
	Low

In a comparative sense, the first group of unhappy idealists represent the profile of a traditional compensatory consumer to the greatest extent, given that their behaviour was persistent, driven by enduring insecurities, they tended to suffer from a large discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves, they exhibited limited consciousness and rationality, engaged in extensive rationalisation, often acted outside of control with no evidence of need fulfilment, and frequently experienced post-purchase regret and remorse. These latter experiences emerged as part of consumers' efforts to rationalise their behaviour, heavily emphasising deservedness. Some extent of consumer- and market-driven compromises prevailed, but ultimately the vast majority of consumer engagements were highly compensatory and resulted in no need satisfaction.

In comparison to the first cluster, members of the other three groups displayed lower instances of compensatory tendencies, which tended to be more sporadic and emerged mostly in certain key domains. In the case of the second group of aspirational non-conformists, compensatory engagements were prevalent only when the pursuit of an item or experience was in line with consumers' aspirational identities. They maintained higher levels of control, exhibited limited rationalisation, and in general were more self-accepting. Context was important in informing them about relevant consumer trends and also to solicit social confirmation. Consumption and possessions were carefully selected to make up a unique collection of items aiming to enhance a desired personal display. Consumer-driven compromises were the most prominent behaviours, with some indications of compensatory tendencies and utility optimisation.

The third group of mental modelists approximated need fulfilment and utility optimisation to the greatest extent, with independent consumption events, limited rationalisation, attainable aspirations to achieve need-based consumption, and high degrees of consciousness and rationality. They did make occasional consumer-driven compromises, in an attempt to address personal constraints or deal with overwhelming complexity. These compromises enabled them to establish the mental models on the one hand to help them avoid impulsive engagements, and on the other hand to ensure need satisfaction. As these consumers were open to and motivated by experimentation, greater context was relevant to provide them with ideas, inspirations and social expectations, which in turn shaped their consumption. Compensatory engagements emerged occasionally in the positive sense, capturing largely reward-based or therapeutic tendencies. Importantly, their compensatory and compromisory engagements were not driven by an ideal or aspirational identity and tended to occur in response to transient emotional states or contextual cues.

The fourth and final group of happy experientialists represented behaviours that alternated between consumer- and market-driven compromise and utility optimisation. Despite their general posture as non-regular consumers, participants pursued some material goods and experiences motivated to escape from their otherwise highly controlled daily lives. During these endeavours, they tended to achieve high satisfaction not so much from the actual possession or experience but rather from the process of engaging in its pursuit. Although these consumers were quite reluctant to admit any compromise for themselves, consumer-driven compromises were common to ensure personal and financial welfare, especially when preceding an anticipated impulsive shopping spree. Context was most relevant in driving market-driven compromises and consuming in certain more advantageous cultural settings. While understanding the prevalence of compensatory and compromisory engagement within the lifeworld of individuals is important in general, they are particularly relevant in the case of this group, as otherwise we may run the risk to label them incorrectly as compensatory consumers. Further elaboration on this will be made in Chapter 7.

6-E. General summary

The purpose of the present chapter was to explore the second two research questions exploring the continuum of compensatory consumption and the role of compromise in the lifeworld of consumers. Regarding the continuum of compensatory behaviours, I discovered that instead of categorising consumers into distinct compensatory styles in line with Table 2.3 (pp. 38), it seemed more advantageous to establish different consumer profiles and explore the extent to which compensatory tendencies prevailed across these groups. In this endeavour, I established four different consumer types that were differentiated on the basis of key dimensions emerging throughout the interviews. Consumer profiles were distinguished by the extent of identify congruence, self-acceptance, key motivation and extent of need fulfilment. Furthermore, the discussions concerning consumer compromises were helpful to complement the earlier sections concentrating on compensatory consumption via presenting further nuance and richness to understand ways in which consumers make decisions, cope with personal and contextual constraints, and evaluate their possessions in light of their overall satisfaction.

In the following chapter (Chapter 7), I turn to exploring the current findings vis-a-vis the extant literature. In particular, I will return to relevant debates in contemporary scholarship, and elaborate on ways in which the present thesis and the findings enlighten and advance our understanding of compensatory consumption and consumer compromise.

CHAPTER 7.

DISCUSSION, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The thesis explored compensatory and compromisory engagements in a comprehensive fashion. Employing a set of phenomenological interviews conducted with 25 consumers, the current work set out to explore four research areas: 1) the process of compensatory engagements as experienced within the lifeworld of consumers; 2) the role of context in compensatory consumption; 3) the existence of a continuum of compensatory consumption; and 4) the role of compromise in the everyday life of consumers. For each of these areas, specific research questions were formulated that can be found in Chapter 2 (pp 47). The present thesis is novel in that it embraces a comprehensive process-based view of compensatory consumption, emphasises the importance of contextual considerations, captures a continuum of compensatory engagements, and discusses compensation and compromise simultaneously as they occur within the consumer's lifeworld.

Synthesising the material from earlier chapters of this thesis, the purpose of the current chapter is to present the discussions, conclusions, limitations and future research directions. Concerning its structure, the chapter will begin with a brief overview of the key findings and elaborate on ways in which they complement the available literature. Following, certain consumer behavioural theories will be explored that seem relevant for the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption, but where such links have not been established previously. These include goal theory, the positioning of post-acquisition rationalisation as a form of defence, and the notion of non-consumption or anti-consumption and their role in the formation of consumer identity. Finally, I conclude the chapter by offering managerial implications, followed by a review of the limitations associated with the present work, and the identification of new avenues for future research.

7-A. Overview of key findings

The present research gave rise to four different consumer types that emerged as a function of four key pillars: 1) the extent of congruence between actual and ideal self-states and consumer identities, 2) the extent of self-acceptance, 3) the underlying motivations that drove compensatory and compromisory engagements; and finally 4) the extent of need satisfaction achieved from the compensatory consumer experience. Building on these factors, descriptive labels were identified to summarise and capture the essence of the four different consumer profiles, including: 1) unhappy idealists; 2) aspirational non-conformists; 3) mental modelists; and 4) happy experientialists. Generally speaking, as we move away from the first group towards the other three, the discrepancy between participants' actual and ideal selves decreases, in turn enabling higher degrees of self-acceptance. In addition, motivations gradually shift from ideal-self attainment towards need fulfilment obtained from the product or the experience, with the context playing an increasingly important role.

7-A.1. Reviewing the four consumer types

The first group of *unhappy idealists* embodied the classic stereotype of a compensatory consumer as depicted in prior literature. These individuals struggled with a range of persistent insecurities that were often brought upon by different triggers and contextual cues. They enjoyed chasing products but did not seem to get much appreciation out of them following acquisition. Newly acquired possessions lost their novelty value relatively fast, resulting in new compensatory cycles. Motivated to close the gap between their actual and ideal selves, these consumers showcased the widest array of compensatory consumption, including obsessive-compulsive tendencies, proneness to addictions and impulse buying. Given the lack of need satisfaction, compensatory engagements were recurrent and cyclical, and often resulted in post-purchase rationalisations and justifications. The behaviours of the first cluster were predominantly compensatory in orientation, with some instances of consumer- and to a lesser extent market-driven compromise.

The second group of *aspirational non-conformists* revealed a substantially smaller gap between their ideal and actual selves and demonstrated higher degrees of self-acceptance. They identified a clear distinction in their history that encouraged them to consciously move away from heavily compensatory and compulsive tendencies towards embracing non-consumerist ideologies. Their primary motivation was associated with pursuing an aspirational consumer identity that was largely driven by relevant consumer trends and a sense of uniqueness. These consumers cared about the image they portrayed to the outside world, and in order to achieve a desirable outcome pursued special possessions with a unique story. Overall, the behaviours of consumers in this cluster represented less compensatory and more compromisory tendencies. They achieved at least partial and sometimes full need satisfaction, experiencing limited or no follow-up regret.

The third group of *mental modelists* did not present much evidence of compensatory tendencies and their consumption was largely driven to achieve need satisfaction and utility optimisation. They displayed a substantially smaller gap between their actual and ideal selves, and occasional discrepancies were triggered by transient contextual cues as opposed to persistent insecurities. Members of this cluster applied relevant decision shortcuts and mental models to guide their behaviour, which they occasionally reviewed and revised, like when they caught themselves engaging in impulsive behaviours which they tried to avoid. Compensatory engagements were substantially less prevalent and occurred mostly in instances of reward and to some extent conspicuous consumption, showcasing instances of retail therapy, self-gifting and reward consumption. They achieved high levels of need satisfaction, and although they reflected upon their experience for their own learning, they did not contemplate the purchase itself in the sense of regret or need for social confirmation.

The fourth and final consumer cluster of the *happy experientialists* revealed an interesting dichotomy. These consumers were highly self-accepting and did not show any evidence of a desired aspirational future ideal. Compensatory consumption for them appeared sporadically, was an independent event, and was motivated by a need to escape and find a form of distraction from their

otherwise controlled daily lives. During these specific times, participants showcased incidents of impulsive and even extreme comportments. At the same time, they were happy to own up to these behaviours, and demonstrated no follow-up rationalisation, remorse or regret. Consumer-driven compromises were prevalent to ensure personal and financial welfare, especially when preceding an anticipated impulsive shopping spree. While understanding the prevalence of compensatory and compromisory engagement within the lifeworld of individuals is important in general, they are particularly relevant in the case of this group, as otherwise they may be labelled incorrectly as 'classic' compensatory consumers.

7-A.2. General summary

On the most fundamental level, consumers varied in their perceived discrepancy between their ideal and actual selves and the extent to which they accepted their consumer identity, which in turn had a strong impact on many of their consumption-related decisions. Importantly, the first group that exhibited the greatest incongruity between their actual and ideal selves also displayed the widest array of compensatory engagements, as was apparent by the breadth and depth of discussions concerning their consumer stories. In terms of predispositions, some groups portrayed enduring and persistent frustrations that surfaced on a regular basis and were triggered easily into awareness, often escalating without the consumers' control. On the other end of the spectrum and in the case of other groups predispositions became more transient, temporary and contextual, with consumers being able to retain a greater sense of control.

Most triggers operated in combination drawing on enduring needs and a collection of triggers, further justifying the importance of examining consumer experiences in a holistic fashion, in a way that takes into account their lifeworld. Similarly, motivations for some groups were driven by making up for earlier frustrations and correcting habits or lifestyle choices, with the focus being on substantial change and qualitative improvement. In the case of other groups, however, consumption engagements were motivated by meeting needs and wants and by achieving small incremental enhancement. Behaviours also varied, ranging from recurrent compensatory cycles to more sporadic and isolated consumption events. In terms of the post-acquisition stage, positive and negative thoughts and emotions were frequent across the four clusters, with some emphasising regret and remorse while others focusing on product ownership and usage or the sheer enjoyment of the experience.

As for general comportments, some participants seemed quite rational in their consumption engagements, were happy to talk about their experiences, and did not experience much post-purchase regret. In contrast, others were less rational, fluctuated between conscious and unconscious reasoning, and engaged in extensive follow-up rationalisation.

7-B. Contributions to the literature of compensatory and compromisory consumption

The present research makes a number of contributions that help advance our understanding of compensatory and compromisory consumption in a number of ways; both conceptually and methodologically.

7-B.1. Theoretical contributions

In terms of theoretical contributions, the present research advanced our understanding of compensatory and compromisory consumption from a conceptual standpoint in a number of ways. First, by embracing a processual orientation, the present research captured the multi-faceted nature of compensatory consumption that spread to pre- as well as post-acquisition period (Schouten, 1991; Paim, 1995; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), as opposed to focusing solely on the point of purchase as a single isolated behaviour. By understanding consumers' insecurities, motivations, personal preferences and product usage, it was possible to place the actual acquisition event within the greater context and life story of consumers and see how they served as a marker and extension of their identity. This is important when we consider earlier work that emphasises the symbolic meaning of consumption, positing that products play a substantial role in the formation, maintenance and communication of identity (Elliott, 1998; Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Oyserman, 2009; Shankar et al., 2009). The consumer stories showcased in this thesis confirmed consumers' tendency to select objects that are meaningful for them and contribute to their overall identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Ferraro et al., 2013).

Second, the present research accentuated the importance of viewing not only the pursuit and possessions of material goods as relevant in understanding compensatory consumer behaviour more fully, but to also consider other experiences that pertain to foods, services, social interactions and more generally experiential consumption. In particular, many consumer stories reflected upon the importance of compensatory food consumption, sharing a meal, a glass of wine and nice moments with friends as a compensatory reaction, pursuing consumption activities for the sake of socialising, and ultimately engaging in consuming goods and services for the enjoyment of the process rather than the outcome. These results are in line with the body of consumer research that shifted from utilitarian considerations that fulfil tangible, practical and non-sensory needs to incorporate hedonic aspects that address fantasy, enjoyment and experiential benefits (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Chitturi et al., 2008). In line with the theory of flow, the current results support the notion that consumption in some situations may serve as a vehicle not only to obtain goods and services, but also to achieve rewarding existential states (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Woodruffe-Burton et al., 2002a).

Third, embracing a comprehensive view of compensatory consumption, one that captured a continuum of diverse sub-types ranging from the negative pole of compulsive tendencies to the positive pole of self-gifting and reward consumption was helpful in achieving a fuller understanding of this

complex phenomenon. Earlier definitions concentrating on one or another form often fell short in capturing the extent of embedded complexity also overlooked potential links to consumer compromise, which was particularly important in understanding the variations across the different consumer types. The present thesis complements the literature by providing a comprehensive and simultaneous discussion of compensation and compromise, which is a novel approach. The results indicated that the first consumer group of unhappy idealists represented the widest array of compensatory engagements – with often several sub-types represented within a single compensatory event, while the other three clusters revealed higher instances of compromise.

Fourth, the variation in prevalence of compensatory consumption has important ramifications for the current stage of research in this area of inquiry. As demonstrated by the consumer stories and in line with prior work, compensatory consumption engagements were not always negative, and as such did not necessarily lead to addiction and compulsive tendencies as proposed by some scholars (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; Kim & Gal, 2014). Instead, a more balanced account of compensatory tendencies was presented, in line with existing scholarship that emphasises the everyday nature of these comportments and their potential for even some therapeutic and mood-alleviating outcomes (Woodruffe, 1997; Kang, 2009). Furthermore, considering the wide range of different consumer types represented in the current sample, the results also support the proposition that compensatory consumption is not restricted to disadvantaged and minority groups, but rather is characteristic of the general public (Grunert, 1994; Elliott, 1998).

Finally, discussing compensatory consumption and consumer compromise simultaneously was helpful to better understand the ways in which they exerted a combined effect on consumer behaviour and choice. Expanding upon Gronmo (1988)'s theory of need satisfaction, adopting Tadajewski (2016)'s notion of the compromising consumer, and building upon Tosdal (1940)'s typology for market- and consumer-driven compromises, I introduced a novel conceptual distinction between compensation and compromise. With this approach, I was able to advance the study of compensatory consumption in new and previously unexplored areas that seem to hold interesting avenues for further research. Ultimately, by differentiating between compensatory and compromisory consumption, I was able to further develop and deepen our conceptual understanding of this important and still under researched area.

7-B.2. Methodological contributions

From a methodological standpoint, the thesis made concrete advancements in moving the research beyond laboratory settings and tapping into a wider range of consumer types. This was important for a variety of reasons. First, moving beyond student samples and US panel data – which tend to dominate the field (Echo Wen, Vohs, et al., 2014; Kim & Gal, 2014; Lisjak, Bonezzi, Kim, et al., 2015) – are important to enhance our understanding of the prevalence of compensatory engagements in a broader population. The thesis relied on a sample of international consumers, including students, young

professionals, top managers, self-employed freelancers, academics, writers, and stay-at-home moms. Although the present research was not motivated to achieve far-reaching generalisations, such a broad array of sampling ensured a greater representation of different experiences and a richer foundation of consumer stories.

Second, exploring compensatory and compromisory engagements in real-life as opposed to laboratory settings has been greatly advantageous in capturing experiences as they occurred in the lifeworld of participants, rather than being pre-determined and exclusively controlled by the experimenter. As highlighted in Chapter 2, many experimental studies emphasise an individual's engagement in compensatory behaviours in response to perceived personal threats and shortcomings, placing the potential impact of socio-contextual factors in the background (Garg & Lerner, 2006; Gao et al., 2009; Kim & Gal, 2014). In contrast, the present thesis clearly identified context as an important determinant – alone as well as in combination with other triggers and motivations – to contribute to the emergence of compensatory and compromisory engagements. To recount a few examples, relevant behaviours emerged in response to a range of contextual cues, boredom, an upcoming social event, or an experience that was perceived in the consumer's own evaluation as frustrating or stressful. The point is that context was highly prevalent throughout many consumer stories, which was only possible to capture when viewed within the consumers' lifeworld.

In this sense, the present research builds extensively on earlier work by Woodruffe (1997), Hamilton and Catterall (2006b), Hamilton (2009) and others, who engaged in similar endeavours employing in-depth phenomenological interviews. Furthermore, the present approach also contributes to the increasing body of work that documents the influence of psychological and personal attributes on consumption, including stable and enduring features like propensity for depression, in combination with transient and situational qualities like retail environment and product characteristics (Kleine et al., 1995; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009; Amos et al., 2014; Antonetti & Baines, 2014).

Along these lines, the different types of compensatory engagements and the way they co-occurred in individual consumer experiences would also have been overlooked should they not have been observed via concrete and holistic experiential accounts. The emergence of the four consumer types provide further support for this, capturing a diverse combination of compensatory and compromisory behaviours across the different groups. The behaviours of the fourth consumer cluster of happy experientialists are particularly relevant to further inform this discussion. In particular, when viewed within an experimental setting, the comportments of these consumers may easily be taken for being compensatory, which – being aware of their underlying motivation driven by escape rather than personal insecurities – would fall short in explaining the entire story.

Third, throughout the present thesis, I illustrated that different behaviours entailed different levels of conscious awareness, rationality and rationalisation; another point that is difficult to demonstrate in laboratory settings. While quantitative and experimental approaches may work well in exploring

transactions and consumption engagements where the consumer is highly attentive, this may not be the case in other scenarios; as permeated throughout the consumer stories. In fact, scholars nowadays increasingly stress the importance of emotional, experiential and non-conscious mechanisms in structuring decision-making and behaviour (Bargh, 2002; Henning et al., 2012), which is particularly prevalent in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption.

Finally, consumers' participation in in-depth interviews as opposed to other forms of inquiry was beneficial in presenting a further layer of analysis that emerged from the dialogue between the participant and the interviewer. As mentioned throughout the earlier chapters of the thesis, although participants were quite open and happy to talk about their experiences, most of them have not given extensive prior thought to their consumption. This was not surprising given that most of their experiences took place on an unconscious level outside of their immediate awareness, and hence their answers were more spontaneous as opposed to being carefully fabricated. This also supports the notion of relying on actual stories rather than direct questions for purposes of inquiry, as these are more likely to elicit actual experiences and be less subject to social desirability bias. In line with earlier work, the current research supports the proposition that making sense of consumption tends to be an iterative process for individuals; one that evolves as it is being negotiated between – or in a sense co-created by – the participant and the interviewer (Russell & Levy, 2012; Becker, 2018; Luchs & Mick, 2018; Barbosa & Fonseca, 2019).

7-C. Implications for Consumer Research

In addition to further advancing existing scholarship in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption, the findings from the present thesis can make further meaningful contributions to a few additional areas of consumer research that have not been previously explored. The following section will outline some examples, with particular attention to goal theory, the literature on post-consumption rationalisation, and the area of negative or non-consumption in compensatory engagements.

7-C.1. Linking goal theory to compensatory and compromisory consumption

The present research explored the role of motivations in exerting an impact – often in combination with predispositions and triggers – on compensatory and compromisory consumption. Reaching beyond the extant literature, applying aspects of goal theory may be meaningful yet have not been taken forward in the existing literature. Examining the interaction between self-construal and goal-type on motivation for goal pursuit, Haiyang et al. (2015) distinguish between attainment goals, where individuals' actual state on a certain dimension differs from their desired state, as opposed to maintenance goals, where the actual and the desired states are already matching. Moreover, the researchers conclude that for consumers with independent self-construal, which emphasises individual advancement, attainment

goals tend to be more motivating, whereas for those with interdependent self-construal, which emphasises stability and continuity, maintenance goals become more relevant.

With reference to the current research, reflecting upon the experience of the first group of unhappy idealists who faced a large discrepancy between their actual and ideal states which they were persistently motivated to reduce, need satisfaction was unlikely, resulting in frequent compensatory relapses. In line with the above study, attainment goals were most likely to be at play, with consumers perpetually chasing a qualitatively different consumer self. Although somewhat less accentuated, attainment goals also applied to the second group of aspirational non-conformists, who were pursuing a rather fluid aspirational identity that was regularly re-evaluated with the arrival of new consumer trends or with the reception of undesirable social feedback.

Consistently with the above framework, members of the first two groups seemed to embrace an independent self-construal, whereby they placed a large emphasis on their own traits, abilities and values, believed that any change will come from within and is dependent mostly on them, making their consumption rather individualistic and internally oriented, prioritising personal goals (Downie, Koestner, Horberg, & Haga, 2006). The two groups of consumers pursued an ideal or aspirational consumer identity respectively, which entailed constant reflections and introspection, and stressed a high degree of autonomy (Grace, 2002). In their self-descriptions, they were more likely to talk about themselves as individuals, as opposed to being members of groups or a larger collective. Furthermore, they emphasised their need for uniqueness as an important basis of their self-esteem (Cross, Hardin, & Swing, 2009).

In the case of the other two groups, consumer tendencies and overall identities were quite constant over the life-course, and hence maintenance goals were more likely to prevail, incorporating potential minor adjustments along with a higher prevalence of compromise rather than compensation. Furthermore, these consumers were more likely to be characterised by an interdependent self-construal, which entailed a greater focus on the collective, embracing a higher degree of conformity (Grace, 2002), and engaging in consumption activities for the sake of social interactions (Downie et al., 2006). Sustaining social connections were important considerations for these consumers, and fitting in with a desired group served as a relevant basis of their self-esteem (Cross et al., 2009).

The above section illustrates that goal theory, with the distinction it makes between attainment and maintenance goals, and the links it establishes with independent as opposed to interdependent self-construal, provide a useful framework for the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption. In particular, people engaging in compensation were faced with a greater discrepancy between their ideal and desired states, were further away from their optimal goal, and were less likely to achieve need satisfaction and goal attainment. This, in turn, tended to increase the likelihood of recurrent compensatory cycles. The same discrepancy seemed less substantial for the compromising consumers, who were closer to the desired state, and were likely to achieve at least partial need satisfaction. This framework presented a useful mapping to differentiate between compensation and compromise as a

function of the underlying goals driving the behaviours and the cognitive representation of the self, which in turn contributes to our understanding of compensatory and compromisory consumption.

7-C.2. Post-consumption rationalisation as a defence mechanism

In contrast with earlier propositions, studies in the area of consumer research have long recognised that individuals are often irrational, unpredictable, and driven by emotions, non-utilitarian aspects, unconscious impulses, and hedonic triggers rather than pure reason (Kassarjian, 1971; Markin, 1979; Babin et al., 1994), expanding the field beyond assumptions of rationality (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Ajzen, 1991; Phillips et al., 1995). In addition to placing an increasing emphasis on the consumer and their needs and wants, it was also acknowledged that much consumption was not urgent, but instead was optional and postponable (Tosdal, 1933).

These directions resonate particularly well with the area of compensatory consumption and with the current thesis, suggesting that people often consume in a way to satisfy needs for esteem and self-actualisation (Gronmo, 1988) or to overcome a felt deficiency (Grunert, 1994). These behaviours are not necessarily rational or utilitarian in that they do not tackle the core problem directly, but instead enable individuals to relieve their discomfort by reverting to alternatives (Kang, 2009). Importantly, the lack of rationality can extend beyond the stage of acquisition. More specifically, when recognising the discrepancy, consumers often experience a sense of guilt and remorse to which they respond by engaging in strategies such as over-buying, hidden ownership, comparative expenditure and self-gifting which enable them to rationalise (in manifold ways) their purchase and limit regret (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998; Chang & Tseng, 2014).

Despite the increasing recognition of consumers' lack of rationality during the acquisition stage and some references made to the same during the post-acquisition stage, previous research has not tackled this issue extensively in the area of compensatory and compromisory consumption, and hence our understanding remains limited, particularly in relation to the period following consumption. Extending this discussion beyond compensatory consumption where rationalisation may be more obvious, it is also relevant to review relevant ramifications within the area of compromise. Prior research shows that after seeking a product, individuals often experience post-purchase dissonance that may result from the amount of choice available in contemporary society and the inability to judge whether or not the right decision has been made (Markin & Narayana, 1976). Consequently, consumers may engage in a rationalisation process, and try to convince themselves that they did, indeed, make the right choice. This may be particularly relevant for the case of the compromising consumer, who – by definition – makes choices driven by market- or alternatively by consumer-driven constraints.

Markin (1979) conceptualises rationalisation as a defence mechanism that enables individuals to provide socially acceptable reasons to justify their behaviour. There are several examples in the area of substance abuse that seem relevant here. For instance, in their research exploring binge drinking

tendencies amongst college students, Wombacher, Matig, Sheff, and Scott (2019) find that participants employ a variety of rationalisation strategies as a form of defence mechanism to combat their follow-up dissonance. Similarly, Wee et al. (2017) explored the cognitive and emotional experience of relapse following a period of abstinence from smoking, in order to identify the types of rationalisations engaged. The authors identified different defence mechanisms employed by relapsing smokers that included focusing on minimising the health risks, switching to lower-tar cigarettes, or reducing the number of cigarettes smoked, in order to protect their non-smoker image. W. B. Lee et al. (2009) further suggest the role of social norms in combination with smokers' regret and rationalisation to influence quitting intentions. More specifically, negative social norms toward smoking were more likely to be associated with regret rather than rationalisations regarding smoking behaviours for individuals. These examples demonstrate that rationalisations to reduce identity conflict are quite common in some areas of consumer research, but they have not been applied directly to the area of compensatory consumption; which would be an interesting avenue.

Based on the results from the present thesis, clear incidents of rationalisation were common amongst the unhappy idealists, who frequently struggled to achieve an optimal balance of viewing themselves in line with their ideals and at the same time owning up to their actual compensatory acts, fluctuating between conscious and unconscious reasoning. The interview experience itself often seemed to heighten these seemingly uncomfortable cognitive and emotional states even further, as many consumers readily reverted to different strategies, such as shifting the blame to others, recounting the pressure felt from family members and peers, or emphasising their otherwise rational and need-based comportments. Fear of missing out (FOMO) and choices to refrain from engagement in alternative high-value experiences such as holiday travel to justify compensatory engagements were also common. Finally, consumers often shifted the purpose of their purchases to emphasise self-gifting and deservedness with an intention to minimise the emerging discomfort. As a further extension of these observations, it may be relevant to revisit Markin (1979)'s ideas as they apply to decisions pertaining to product categorisation. More specifically, some consumers may alter the conceptualisation of products to shift them from a hedonic to a utilitarian calculus (Voss et al., 2003; Khan & Dhar, 2010), with several examples showcased among members of the first cluster.

In contrast with the first group, aspirational non-conformists did not tend to engage in direct rationalisation following their consumption acts, and as long as a particular pursuit was in line with their aspirational identity, they seemed comfortable with their purchase. At the same time, their meticulous obsession with certain consumer trends like decluttering, sustainability and mindfulness can be viewed as an indirect way to rationalise their consumer identity and corresponding way of consuming. In the case of the first two consumer types, in line with the above discussion on goal theory and their attainment goal orientation, rationalisation can clearly be viewed as a form of defence to reduce the dissonance resulting from the experience of an identity conflict. In the case of the first group the conflict arose as behaviours contradicted the espoused rational and need-based ideologies, while in

the second group the contradiction was experienced when defying individuals' overall posture as non-consumers.

In a comparative sense, post-acquisition rationalisations were somewhat less obvious and direct in the remaining two consumer clusters, although they nonetheless prevailed on some occasions. In the case of mental modelists, post-acquisition rationalisations were often used to develop or further perfect the cognitive shortcuts and models employed by individuals to maximise their satisfaction. For instance, although they may have consumed a particular item driven by non-utilitarian considerations, such as buying a luxury car or a special outfit to fit in with their overall context, over time they justified their decisions by emphasising the superior quality of an item, the fit of a piece of clothing, or the greater reliability and longevity anticipated from the product. Amongst the happy experientialists, rationalisations concentrated on emphasising the superior social and/or experiential value derived from the experience. In the latter two groups, consumers did not experience a clear identity conflict, in contrast with their earlier counterparts, and hence rationalisations cannot be viewed as a form of defence the same way. In line with their maintenance goal orientation, these consumers rationalised their behaviours not to address and restore a dissonance but to apply minor incremental modifications, or alternatively to confirm acceptance of occasional behavioural deviations.

Overall, the above section confirmed that similarly to the area of substance abuse, it seems reasonable to explore post-acquisition rationalisation in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption to help disentangle the emotional and cognitive processes that characterise consumer reflections during this period. In some cases, like in the first two groups, where consumers were faced with dissonance and identity conflict, rationalisation can be interpreted as a form of defence. In other cases, however, such as in the second two groups, where consumer experiences did not reflect clear instances of dissonance, rationalisation seemed to play a different and less explicit role.

7-C.3. The role of non-consumption and anti-consumption in compensatory engagements

An increasing number of consumers are moving away from a lifestyle that is characterised by materialism and consumption in general (Stammerjohan & Webster, 2002). In a study conducted with users of an online program 'Hello Sunday Morning' (HSM) that encourages people to commit to a non-drinking period and blog about their experience, Pennay, MacLean, and Rankin (2016) find that individuals use consumption as well as non-consumption activities to maintain their sense of self, negotiating the relationship between selfhood, consumption and culture. Non-consumption trends have been studied amongst active abstainers of Facebook by Portwood-Stacer (2013), who – in addition to accentuating the conspicuous charge underlying these behaviours given their public orientation – drew further links with elitism and confirming political stands when it comes to online media platforms. Buchanan-Oliver and Savage (2006) suggest that choosing not to consume a product can be just as significant in terms of defining self-identity as choosing one (Nixon & Gabriel, 2016), further

accentuating the importance of exploring this concept in the realm of compensatory and compromisory consumption.

As a related concept, anti-consumption has been positioned as a form of non-consumption that refers to consumers' attempts to avoid certain products or brands based on symbolic reasons underlying avoidance (Gram, Hohnen, & Pedersen, 2017). Anti-consumption has been also viewed as an intentional form of non-consumption, sometimes combined with consumer resistance driven by sustainability considerations (Cherrier, Black, & Lee, 2011). Finally, some authors conceptualised anti-consumption to reflect the continuum of consumer responses towards traditionally marketed products that may range from non-consumption to active rejection, which in turn could be driven by authenticity or frugality (Shyue Wai Lee & Fernandez, 2006).

Relating this literature stance to the current thesis, several groups demonstrated non-consumption trends in various ways. For the unhappy idealists, non-consumption and sustainable and responsible consumption were the ideal, although they found it difficult to adhere to this in reality. In contrast, compensatory engagements often represented impulsive and compulsive tendencies, contradicting need-based and utilitarian aspirations. For the aspirational non-conformists, non-consumption was an actual reality, as they took pride in consuming in a way that contradicted mainstream consumer society and global trends. Although the concept of anti-consumption was strongest in the case of this group, some of their consumption ended up being compensatory, but materialised in a more socially acceptable manner. For the mental modelists, the notion of non-consumption prevailed only insofar as they tried to reduce impulsive purchases that would be more likely to lead to follow-up dissatisfaction and regret. For the final group of happy experientialists, non-consumption tendencies could be linked directly with market- and consumer-based compromise, showing a preference for sustained non-consumption to avoid frustration or financial vulnerability.

Overall, the area of non-consumption and anti-consumption seems quite relevant for the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption, and the current thesis began to shed light on how they may apply to this area of inquiry. Future studies should focus specifically on ways in which consumers engage in non-consumption and anti-consumption as a form of compensation and compromise within their lifeworld.

7-D. Managerial implications

The present research has the potential to inform managerial practice in a number of ways. In general, the processual orientation taken to study compensatory and compromisory consumption and the rich experiences showcased by participants can help managers in their understanding of their consumers' lived consumption experiences from a more holistic perspective. Furthermore, the emergence of the four distinct consumer types or personas can assist managers in their approach towards their consumers in a more personalised fashion. The variable role of staff, for instance, at different points of contact

with the consumers seems important in ensuring satisfactory as opposed to unsatisfactory outcomes. As portrayed by the consumer stories, for some groups and on some occasions, staff interventions in the sense of involvement, help and advice were welcome and even solicited, whereas in other instances they achieved the opposite result in that they were viewed by consumers as an intrusion and a source of stress.

Prior research has established links between high consumer confidence and subsequent success with atmosphere as well as sales staff attributes (Peretz, 1995; Newman & Patel, 2004; Hu & Jasper, 2006; Forgas, Dunn, & Granland, 2008; Furnham & Milner, 2013). In their research focusing on consumer self-gifting, Mick, Demoss, and Faber (1992) stress the vital importance of staff training beyond professionalism and product knowledge. The authors recommend using role-playing techniques, simulations, and other tools to boost the interpersonal skills of retail staff, with particular attention to active listening. The current study underscores these propositions, recognising the role of consumer motivations and preferences in eliciting different expectations concerning consumer-staff interactions. Many consumer stories showcased in this thesis revealed that different strategies may work best with different groups. While enthusiastic approaches may suit happy experientialists whose drive for enjoyment and gratification makes them more susceptible for hedonic indulgence and spending, the same behaviours may backfire with unhappy idealists, who may even end up ‘blaming’ the sales staff during their post-acquisition rationalisation phase for pushing them into making a purchase. Consequently, given that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy is not sufficient, companies and brand managers should ensure to train their staff to sensitise them to different consumer identities and states of mind (Hartley & Ward, 2006; Rotfeld, 2007; Puccinelli, Deshpande, & Isen, 2008).

The diverse evaluation of shopping centres as opposed to small boutiques and online platforms provided further interesting findings that emerged on the basis of consumer accounts. While shopping centres were a source of gratification in the form of spending time and finding out about new trends for some consumers, for others they presented a source of anxiety and represented a manifestation of mainstream consumerism. This may be good news for small local boutiques who tend to be exposed to extensive competitive pressures, not only from large retail chains but also from online platforms. Particularly considering the strong desire for uniqueness emphasised by many consumers in this thesis, smaller and distinctive retailers may have certain advantages in appealing to specific consumer segments. Furthermore, smaller boutiques may have an opportunity to address consumers’ increasing motivation to engage in socially responsible consumption practices (Shobeiri, Rajaobelina, Durif, & Boivin, 2016). Previous research also established a positive relationship between materialism and both impulsiveness and attitude towards small boutiques (Clow, Cole, & DeNardin, 2014); constructs which were prevalent in many compensatory and conspicuous engagements among participants.

From a contextual standpoint, prior research shows that small boutiques are able to provide different sensory environments and more personalised relational contexts, which may be preferred by certain

consumers (Bickle & Burnsed, 2017). In addition to pleasant retail environments and personalised service, attractive window displays may play a further important role (Mower, Kim, & Childs, 2012), with special attention to the group of unhappy idealists who were particularly susceptible to contextual cues triggering their compensatory reactions.

Along these lines, the important role of experiential consumption that emerged repeatedly across participant stories should be further contemplated. Recent work exploring conspicuous consumption in the area of experiential purchases that incorporated cultural and leisure activities posit that consumers often participate in such encounters motivated by social visibility and identity construction (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019). Holiday travel, in particular, has been positioned as a symbolic and material form of identity demonstration, particularly given our current era infused by social media engagement (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). The current research expands this line of work by emphasising the role of travel not only for its own experiential value but also for purposes of securing unique items with a special story, which in turn may enable consumers to elongate and relive their experience with the support of their espoused possessions (Fu, Liu, Wang, & Chao, 2018).

Finally, although this topic was not addressed directly in the thesis, the current research can make meaningful contributions to the area of brand love and inform ways in which to retain consumers over time (Ahuvia, 2005). Consumers often spoke about their consumption as well as their possessions with a highly emotional charge, reflecting elements of love and affection. This is in line with the majority of brand love studies that approach this multi-faceted construct from the perspective of the theory of interpersonal love (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008, 2009; Rossiter, 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Langner, Schmidt, & Fischer, 2015) or one-way parasocial love (Fetscherin, 2014). To date, relatively few studies have taken a grounded theory and experiential approach to exploring brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia, 2017), and the current research can inform this literature in meaningful ways.

In their conceptual piece synthesizing the existing literature of brand love, Palusuk, Koles, and Hasan (2019) developed a relational typology to differentiate between the three above-mentioned perspectives, using the analogy of love marriage (interpersonal theory), arranged marriage (parasocial theory), and experience-based relationship (ground-up theory). The authors established a further connection between these analogies and an evolutionary trajectory, building on the earlier work of Langner, Bruns, Fischer, and Rossiter (2016). Particularly interesting insights can be obtained in this regard from the experience of the group of mental modelists. Driven by their curiosity and desire for experimentation – while also ensuring utility optimization as much as possible, these consumers often looked for their social surroundings for inspiration and new ideas. When they identified a brand, product or service that worked for them, they tended to stick with it, and establish a mental model to incorporate it into their consumer identity and pursue it in the future. These tendencies are relevant for brand managers, especially considering that many consumers do not start out as immediate brand lovers.

Instead, many tend to be cautious, wanting to ensure continued satisfaction and need fulfilment. Instead of aiming to lure consumers into becoming love at first sight brand lovers as a predominant strategy, which may be a relatively difficult position to sustain in the long run, identifying ways in which to attract the group of mental modelists may be a more lucrative and complementary avenue to exploit.

7-E. Limitations and future research direction

From a conceptual standpoint, I began to link compensatory and compromisory consumption to interesting new areas such as goal theory, post-acquisition rationalisation as a form of defence, and the topic of non-consumption and anti-consumption as they apply to this area of inquiry. Additional empirical work focusing specifically on these topics would be advantageous in that it would have the potential to further advance our understanding of the experience of the different consumer types identified in the present thesis. In addition, exploring the role of gender and how it applies to the area of compensatory and compromisory consumption would present a further interesting avenue that has only been explored in prior work to a limited extent (Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). The role of social media on compensatory and compromisory consumption should also be explored more fully in future work. There was some reference made during some consumer accounts that concerned the impact of social media engagements, but further research is needed to understand this area in a more comprehensive fashion.

From a methodological standpoint, the present thesis demonstrated the value of employing phenomenological interviews to study compensatory and compromisory engagements given their ability to capture a processual approach and reflect upon the complexity of these phenomena. These are difficult to recreate in a laboratory setting, and yet experiments tend to dominate the field. Furthermore, throughout the thesis I illustrated that different behaviours entailed different levels of conscious awareness, rationality and rationalisation; a point which has important implications for methodology. While quantitative and experimental approaches may work well in exploring transactions and consumption engagements where the consumer is highly attentive, this may not be the case in other scenarios (Bargh, 2002; Henning et al., 2012).

In light of these limitations, additional work that employs a greater diversity of methodologies in the study of compensatory and compromisory consumption is highly desirable to further advance the field. Particularly considering consumers' regular fluctuations between conscious and unconscious reasoning when trying to make sense of their behaviours, additional techniques that engage unconscious levels of thought processes would be advantageous. Beyond phenomenological interviews, several other creative examples can be identified from the distal literature that remain largely underrepresented in studies on this topic, including the diary method (Crowley, 1996; Götze et al., 2009; Brown, Costley, Friend, & Varey, 2010; Iida, Shrout, Laurenceau, & Bolger, 2012), scripts (Puto, 1985) and critical incident

techniques (Gremier, 2004; Butterfield et al., 2005). Additionally utilising visual methods, such as the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (Zaltman, 1997, 2000, 2014) may prove to be advantageous, presenting an innovative tool for probing consumers to reveal ways in which unconscious thinking drives their compensatory and compromisory behaviour (Zaltman, 2002).

In terms of sampling, the current thesis advanced the field by exploring compensatory and compromisory consumption in a broader population that moved beyond student samples and panel data. In particular, the present sample included a wider range of professional and personal backgrounds as well as cultural settings. Although this was advantageous as thus far only a few studies took such an approach, there is further room for improvement in future studies. For instance, the present sample included individuals who were relatively highly educated and affluent in comparison to the average population. Future studies may look at less affluent samples and in particular focus on those groups that experience a substantial downward change in their household income due to unexpected unemployment, prolonged illness, or any other external stressor that adds further complexity to their purchase potential. Exciting initial work has been done by Hamilton (2009) and Hamilton and Catterall (2006b) on consumers' experiences following transition into poverty, which would be interesting to apply specifically to the area of compensatory and compromisory consumption. Although I addressed the notion of consumer movement from higher quality to lower quality situations, this area could be further explored and advanced in future research.

7-F. Concluding remarks

The present thesis advanced our understanding of compensatory and compromisory consumption in meaningful ways. The approach taken was novel in that it embraced a comprehensive process-based view, emphasised the importance of context, captured a continuum of compensatory engagements, and discussed compensation and compromise simultaneously as they occurred within the lifeworld of consumers. Expanding upon the theory of need satisfaction, the current thesis proposed and empirically tested a theoretical framework that differentiated between compensatory and compromisory consumption based on the extent of consumer consciousness, rationality and rationalisation exhibited by consumers. The present work made a number of theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature on compensatory consumption, advanced our understanding of the interrelations between compensation and compromise, and proposed meaningful insights to complement existing consumer research. In particular, relevant links were established with the area of goal theory and how they relate to compensation as opposed to compromise; the literature on post-consumption rationalisation as a form of defence across the consumer types; and finally, the role of non-consumption and anti-consumption in compensatory engagements.

In terms of managerial implications, the emergence of the four distinct consumer types were positioned as a way to assist managers in their approach of consumers in a more personalised fashion.

In particular, recognising different consumer motivations and preferences can inform appropriate training content for sales staff, sensitising them to different consumer identities and states of mind. Relevant strategic takeaways were offered to help owners and managers of small retail shops to leverage consumers' need for uniqueness and strive for personalised service. The importance of experiential consumption was emphasised, with particular attention to travel and holiday periods that were more likely to entail impulsive purchases as well as providing consumers with an opportunity to secure unique items with a special story, in turn contributing to their identity construction via symbolic possessions. Finally, relevant links to the area of brand love literature were made, encouraging brand specialists to focus not only on love-at-first-sight consumers but also on those who are driven by experience-based consumption and utility optimisation as a lucrative outlet.

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APPENDIX A.
INTERVIEW FLIER³



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Do you like to treat yourself when you're fed up? Is shopping the best therapy? Is chocolate the greatest cure for depression? Perhaps a glass of wine? Or, do you prefer a trip to the gym / pub / beauty salon / cinema / etc. to lift your spirits?

I am currently undertaking research as part of my doctoral thesis work in the area of consumer psychology and am looking for research participants (male or female) who would be willing to be interviewed as part of this study. Interviews will be strictly confidential and held locally at a time to suit you. As my French skills sadly are not yet up to the task, the interviews would be conducted in English.

If you wish to participate in this academic research, or would like some further information, please contact **Bernadett** via phone at **+33 660 796277**, or via email at ***bernadett.koles@durham.ac.uk***.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

³ Credit for image: Prof. Helen Woodruffe-Burton.

APPENDIX B.

APPROVAL FROM THE ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD OF DURHAM UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

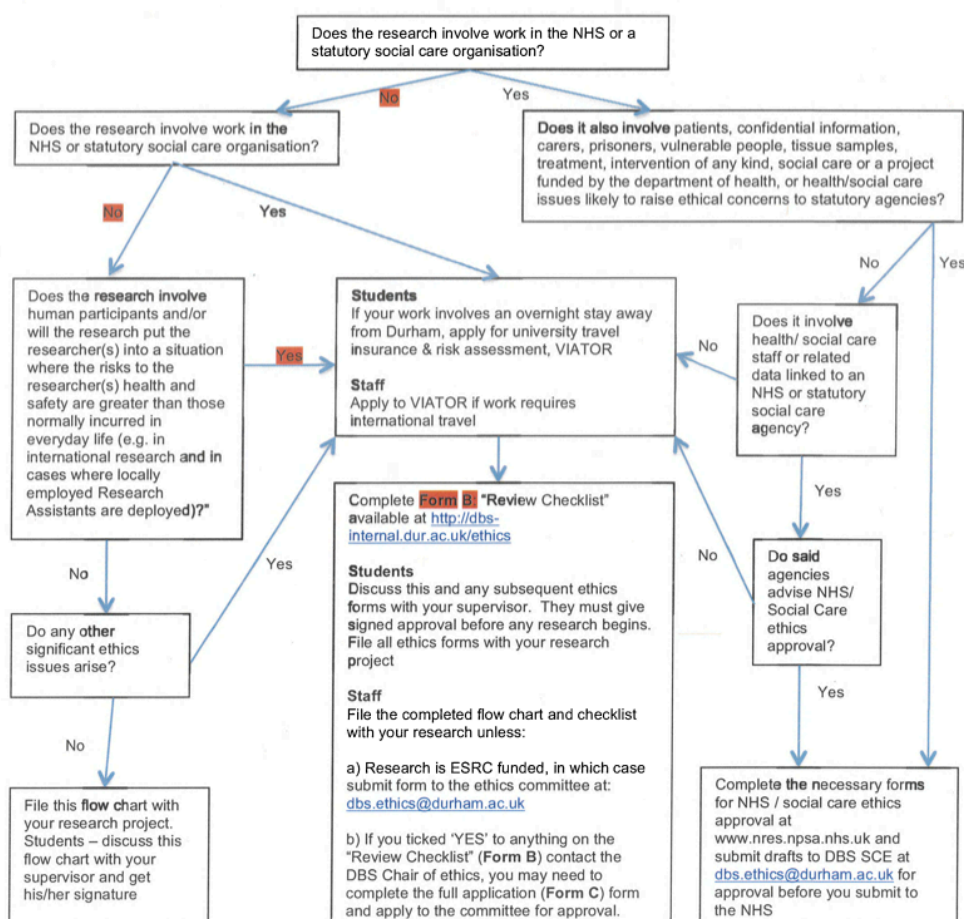


BETTER BUSINESS THINKING

ETHICS FORM 'A' – Process flow chart for students & staff

Title of Project: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS AND COMPENSATORY TENDENCIES AMONG ADULTS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

Name of Principal Researcher or Student: BERNADETT KOLES



Tick one box only

Signature of Principal Researcher or Supervisor:

Signed: B. Koles Date: 09/05/2017

ETHICS FORM B: REVIEW CHECKLIST

"DUBS SCE" refers to Durham University Business School's Sub-Committee for Ethics throughout.

This checklist should be completed for every research project that involves human participants. It should also be completed for all ESRC funded research, once funding has been obtained. It is used for approval or to identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.

Before completing this form, please refer to the University's "Ensuring Sound Conduct in Research" available at <http://dbs-internal.dur.ac.uk/ethics/default.aspx> – all researchers should read Sections A, B and F; Principal Investigators should also read Section D. The researcher and, where the researcher is a student, the student and supervisor are responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgement in this review.

This checklist must be completed before potential participants are approached to take part in any research.

Section I: Project Details

1. Project title: COMPENSATORY CONSUMPTION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW, A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION, AND A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL
- 2.

2. Start date: May 1, 2017 Expected End date: AUG 31, 2018

Section II: Applicant Details

3. Name of researcher (applicant)
Or student: BERNADETT KOLES
4. Status (please delete those which are not applicable)

Postgraduate Research Student
5. Email address
(staff only):
6. Contact address: 12 Rue Duroc, Paris, 75007
7. Telephone number: +33 660 79 62 77

Section III: For Students Only

8. Programme title: PH.D.
9. Mode (delete as appropriate)

Part Time
10. Supervisor's or module leader's name:
PROF. MARK TADAJEWSKI & PROF. VICTORIA WELLS

11. Aims and Objectives: Please state the aims/objectives of the project

The purpose of the current project is to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for compensatory consumption that is currently lacking in the existing literature. Via the employment of a mix of qualitative methods, including phenomenological interviews, diaries and visual techniques, the current project aims to elicit rich experiential accounts, stories and personal narratives that help decipher this complex phenomenon more fully. From a theoretical standpoint, the present work approaches compensatory consumption as an umbrella term and as a process that incorporates pre- and post-consumption periods, and establishes an important distinction between compensation and compromise. The proposed research also addresses certain methodological shortcomings, such that it employs qualitative methods as opposed to experimental approaches, and recruits from the general population as opposed to student samples.

12. Methodology: Please describe in brief the methodology of the research project

A convenience sample of participants will be recruited using the network of the primary investigator (PI), ensuring that the PI had no extensive prior contact with the subjects. Participants will be interviewed by the PI individually on a single occasion. Interviews are anticipated to last for a duration of approx. 1-1.5 hours. All interviews will take place in English. Questions will solicit detailed experiential accounts of a set of personally meaningful possessions of choice, with particular attention to the role of objects and compensatory tendencies. All participants will give their informed consent for the study. Participation is entirely voluntary. Interviews will take place in a public space of the participants' choosing. Results will be kept entirely confidential, and will only be used by the PI and shared within the immediate research team. All potentially identifying references (i.e. quotations) will only be made using pseudo-names, and at no point will the identification of any of the participants be revealed. Interviews will be tape-recorded (provided consent), and all materials will be stored safely.

13. Will data be collected from participants who have not consented to take part in the study e.g. images taken from the internet; participants covertly or overtly viewed in social places? If yes, please give further details. NO

*Does the research take place in a public or private space (be it virtual / physical)? Please explain: -

Explain whether the research is overt or covert: -

Explain how you will verify participants' identities: -

†Explain how informed consent will be obtained: -

*Ethical guidelines (BPS, 2005) note that, *unless consent has been sought, observation of public behaviour takes place only where people would reasonably expect to be observed by strangers.*

†It is advised that interactive spaces such as chat rooms and synchronous and asynchronous forums be treated as private spaces requiring declaration of a research interest and consent.

Additional guidance on internet research can be obtained at:

http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/conducting_research_on_the_internet-guidelines_for_ethical_practice_in_psychological_research_online.pdf

14. Risk assessment: If the research will put the researcher(s) into a situation where risks to the researcher(s)' health and safety are greater than those normally incurred in everyday life, please indicate what the risks are and how they will be mitigated. (Please note that this also includes risks to the researcher(s)' health and safety in cases of international research and in cases where locally employed Research Assistants are deployed).

Research which will take place outside the UK requires specific comment. (Note that research outside the UK is not automatically covered by the University's insurance. See the DUBS intranet site (<http://dbs-internal.dur.ac.uk/ethics/default.aspx>) for further details).

The research will take place in Paris, France, given that it is the current permanent residence of the PI. Given that the PI habitually spends extensive amounts of time abroad, no additional risk will be accrued by her executing the current study. Furthermore, being a part-time student, the primary investigator does not normally spend extended periods of time within the UK. Finally, the PI has universal health coverage within the EU.

For student research the supervisor should tick the following, as appropriate. The study should not begin until all appropriate boxes are ticked:

- ☒ The topic merits further research
- ☒ The participant information sheet or leaflet is appropriate (where applicable)
- ☒ The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate (where applicable)

Comments from supervisor:

Section IV: Research Checklist

Research that may need to be reviewed by NHS NRES Committee or an external Ethics Committee (if yes, please give brief details as an annex)

YES NO

1 Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data or premises and / or equipment?¹ ☐ ☒

2 Does the study involve participants age 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. people with learning disabilities: see Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005). ☐ ☒

Please note: - That with regard to 1 and 2 on the previous page, all research that falls under the auspices of MCA must be reviewed by NHS NRES.

Research that may need a full review by Durham University Business School Sub –Committee for Ethics (DBS SCE)

3 Does the study involve other vulnerable groups: children, those with cognitive impairment, or those in unequal relationship e.g. your own students?² ☐ ☒

4 Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of a self-help group, residents of a Nursing home)³ ☐ ☒

5 Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. deception, covert observation of people in non-public places) ☐ ☒

6 Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics? (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) ☐ ☒

7 Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? ☐ ☒

Research that may need a full review by Durham University Business School Sub – Committee for Ethics (DBS SCE) (continued)

8 Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants? ☐ ☒

9 Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study? ☐ ☒

Footnotes

¹ Research in the NHS may be classified as "service evaluation" and, if so, does not require NHS research ethics approval. In such cases, prior written confirmation that the research is considered to be service evaluation is required from the appropriate authority, and on receipt of this the "No" box may be ticked and this form used for ethics approval. Advice and assistance is available from dbs.ethics@durham.ac.uk

² Vulnerable persons are defined for these purposes as those who are legally incompetent to give informed consent (i.e. those under the age of 16, although it is also good practice to obtain permission from all participants under the age of 18 together with the assent of their parents or guardians), or

Footnotes

¹ Research in the NHS may be classified as "service evaluation" and, if so, does not require NHS research ethics approval. In such cases, prior written confirmation that the research is considered to be service evaluation is required from the appropriate authority, and on receipt of this the "No" box may be ticked and this form used for ethics approval. Advice and assistance is available from dbs.ethics@durham.ac.uk

those with a mental illness or intellectual disability sufficient to prevent them from giving informed consent), or those who are physically incapable of giving informed consent, or in situations where participants may be under some degree of influence (e.g. your own students or those recruited via a gatekeeper - see footnote 3). Where students are perfectly able to choose to be involved and to give informed consent then, so long as there is no impact on assessment, the "No" box may be ticked.

³ This applies only where the recruitment of participants is via a gatekeeper, thus giving rise to particular ethical issues in relation to willing participation and influence on informed consent decisions particularly for vulnerable individuals. It does *not* relate to situations where contact with individuals is established via a manager but participants are willing and able to give informed consent. In such cases, the answer to this question should be "No."

		YES	NO
10	Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	☐	☒
11	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	☐	☒
12	Will the research involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?	☐	☒
13	Does the research involve members of the public in a research capacity (participant research)?	☐	☒
14	Will the research involve respondents to the internet or other visual / vocal methods where methods are covert, intrude into privacy without consent, or require observational methods in spaces where people would not reasonably expect to be observed by strangers? ⁴	☐	☒
15	Will the research involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given?	☐	☒
16	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? ⁵	☐	☒

Section V: What to do next

If you have answered 'No' to all of the questions:

Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught students should discuss this with their supervisor, obtain his or her signature and submit it with their business project or dissertation.

DBA / MPhil / PhD students should discuss this with their supervisor, obtain his or her signature and submit it as part of the transfer / 9 month review process and with their thesis.

Work that is submitted without the appropriate ethics form may be returned un-assessed.

Members of staff should retain a copy for their records, but may submit the form for approval by DUBS SCE if they require approval from funding bodies such as ESRC. *In such cases, the letter of invitation to participate, Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form and, where appropriate, the access agreement should also be submitted with this form.*

Please note that DBS SCE may request sight of any form for monitoring or audit purposes.

If you have answered 'Yes' to any of the questions in Section IV, you will need to describe more fully how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research. This does not mean that you cannot do the research, only that your proposal will need to be approved by the DUBS SCE.

Contact the Chair of the DUBS SCE in the first instance to discuss how to proceed. You may need to submit your plans for addressing the ethical issues raised by your proposal using the ethics approval application form REAF, which should be sent to the committee at dbs.ethics@durham.ac.uk.

(Continued overleaf)

Footnotes

⁴ This does not include surveys using the internet providing that the respondent is identifiable only at their own discretion.

⁵ In experiments in economics and psychology in particular it is common to pay participants. Provided such payments are within the normal parameters of the discipline, the answer to this question should be "No."

(Form REAF can be obtained from the School Intranet site at <http://dbs-internal.dur.ac.uk/Pages/Default.aspx> or using the student / visitor access:-

<http://dbs-internal.dur.ac.uk/ethics>

Username: dubs\ethicsvisitors
Password: durham

If you answered 'yes' to Questions 1 or 2 in Section IV, you will also have to submit an application to the appropriate external health authority ethics committee, but only **after** you have received approval from the DUBS SCE. In such circumstances complete the appropriate **external** paperwork and submit this for review by the DUBS SCE to dbs.ethics@durham.ac.uk.

Please note that whatever answers you have given above, it is your responsibility to follow the University's "Ensuring Sound Conduct in Research" and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. **This includes providing appropriate participant information sheets and consent forms, abiding by the Data Protection Act and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data.**

Any significant change in research question, design or conduct over the course of the research project should result in a review of research ethics issues using the "Process Flow Chart for Students and Staff Undertaking Research" and completing a new version of this checklist if necessary.

Declaration

Signed
(staff only, students insert anonymous code):

Date:

Student / Principal Investigator

Signed

Date: Apr 23, 2017

Signed *V.K.Wch.* *09/05/2017*

Supervisor or module leader (where appropriate)

Date:

APPENDIX C.

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I invite you to participate in the present study on consumption. This work is part of my dissertation, and so your contribution and involvement are extremely highly appreciated. I am interested in how people buy things and what possessions mean to them in their everyday lives. Whether it's a pair of jeans, a new phone, a car, or a supreme Starbucks macchiato, every and any story is interesting to me as long as it is meaningful for you in some way. There are no right or wrong answers, I am simply curious about your own experiences and stories that relate to your current and future possessions and shopping endeavours, and the greater detail you are able to provide the better. For the sake of simplicity, I would like to audiotape the interview.

I would like to assure you that all the data revealed will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and only I will have access to the interview material. Also, at no point during the course of this project will there be any direct relevance made to you by name or any other identifiable information. Your participation is voluntary, and I will be happy to answer any further question you may have about the study.

Thank you once again for your willingness to partake in and contribute to my project.

Signature of Participant:

Signed:..... Date:.....