The influence of satisfaction with life, social contribution and environmental well-being on conscientious consumer decision-making in the South African emerging economy

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Abstract

Emerging economies harbour increasing consumption patterns with detrimental social and environmental consequences. This study postulated that satisfaction with life determines consumers' social contribution and environmental well-being (as sub-dimensions of their overall subjective well-being), which in turn contribute to their conscientious decision-making, especially regarding resource-intensive white goods. Acquiring such goods necessitates conscious thought surrounding the future implications of its use. A non-probability purposive sampling approach yielded a sample of 320 middle- to high-income consumers who were acquiring appliances. Structural equation modelling was performed on the survey data. Satisfaction with life was found to be an equally strong determinant of social contribution and environmental well-being. In turn, environmental well-being was the strongest predictor of respondents' consideration for future environmental consequences in their decision-making. However, more attention is needed to improve consumers' satisfaction with life and their subjective.

Keywords: Well-being; satisfaction of life; conscientious decision-making; sustainable consumption; emerging economy

1. Introduction

Globally, consumption patterns have already reached unsustainable levels (Ganivet, 2020; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018; 2015). South Africa, along with the other emerging economies, have the alarming potential to further increase the global environmental footprint with population growth and demographic changes cited as a particular basis for such concern – these aspects seldom feature in developed economies' sustainability agendas, which tend to prioritize environmental matters above social issues (Barkemeyer et al., 2014). Industrialization, population growth, increase in per capita income and changes in consumption patterns (all of which are prevalent in developing contexts) are seen as root causes for environmental degradation and natural resource depletion (Gandhi et al., 2006; Ganivet, 2020). Moreover, efforts to eradicate poverty (Sustainable Development Goal 1) and stimulate growth in the local economy (Sustainable Development Goal 8; Statistics South Africa (STATS SA, 2017; United 2015), fuelled significant increases in the spending as well as consumption of a newly emergent middle-class consumer in post-apartheid South Africa (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2015, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2012, and Rabouin (2019) states that in 2030, the expenditure in Africa is expected to rise to about $2.5 trillion, more than doubling that of the 2015 expenditures, which can be attributed to the rising middle-class consumer. According to the World Bank (2018) report,

consumption grew by 5% between 2011 and 2015 among the median to upper-median percentiles (40th–75th) of the population, whereas consumption shrank by 1.4% among the poorest segments (bottom 40%) of the population. Although the annual consumer inflation is at a 13-year all-time high in South Africa, the middle-class consumer is still maintaining their standard of living. These consumers are increasingly turning to credit to maintain such lifestyles, placing them in a vulnerable position (Businesstech, 2022). While this growth in consumption among the middle- to upper-income segments may indicate economic growth, it holds opposing negative consequences since current consumption practices cannot be maintained indefinitely considering the country's natural resource scarcity (Statistics South Africa (STATS SA, 2017), as well as personal economic well-being (Businesstech, 2022).

Individual consumption decisions, which are made against the complex backdrop of the aforementioned macro-level conditions, may consequently be led by psychological processes underlying the realization of resource scarcity and the drive towards advancing personal welfare (Roux et al., 2015). For example, people often share the notion that increased spending power and consumption will lead to higher levels of happiness (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Happiness, defined as a momentary pursuit of self-gratification, is seen as an important pursuit among all human beings (Cloutier et al., 2017) and is closely associated with the concepts of subjective well-being and satisfaction with life (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener, 1994). However, simultaneously, it has also been established that consumption of products does not necessarily translate into happiness (Belk, 1985) or greater levels of subjective well-being for the individual (DeLeire & Kalil, 2010). While increases in consumption have seemingly not contributed to superior levels of subjective well-being among the local consumer population (apart from the detrimental environmental impact it has had on the country's natural resources), one might argue that the focus should shift towards first exploring the local community's satisfaction with life, their level of subjective well-being and from there understand how it impacts on their consumption choices.

More specifically, the question posed is whether satisfaction with life and having attained a certain level of subjective well-being can result in consumer decision-making that reflects conscious thought surrounding future consequences of consumption, not only in terms of the environment but also the broader society? As pointed out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018), responses to climate change need to be aligned with sustainable development that affords equal focus among social well-being, economic prosperity and environmental protection (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018). Yet, exploring the interrelationship among these concepts may prove problematic, especially as it relates to consumption choices on a personal level. For example, Neumayer, 2007) explains that due to sustainability's future orientation (i.e. '…the capacity to provide non-declining well-being over time'), current well-being indicators often neglect sustainability's long-term perspective. Conversely, sustainability assessments often omit an individual's current levels of well-being.

2. The conceptual gap

While theories such as the Social Production Function Theory (SPFT; Lindenberg, 1990, 1996) have been developed to predict the interrelationship between physical, social and psychological well-being within the hierarchical structure of utility, universal needs, instrumental goals, activities and endowments as well as resources, the application of such theories have not been tested in depth in developing economies like South Africa, for example. South Africa is characterized by immense diversity, inequalities, and unemployment, which may uniquely influence consumption choices (Burgess, Steven & Jan-Benedict, 2006, World Bank, 2018; Statistics South Africa (STATS SA), 2017). Also, models such as the SPFT do not explicitly capture the standards whereby consumers assess their

well-being over an extended time (Ormel et al., 1997). Therefore, notwithstanding the potential of SPFT to serve as a theoretical basis for exploring consumption behaviour in the local context, the distinction between short term hedonic- and long term eudaimonic pursuits of well-being – as postulated in Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self Determination Theory (SDT) – seemed a more appropriate basis for studying consumption choices that have extended environmental-, economic- and social implications. A typical example includes the evaluation and selection of white goods (i.e. major household appliances), as such decisions hold long-term implications for an individual in terms of financial investment, resource use (water and energy consumption) and social approval (Erasmus et al., 2005; Girling-Budd, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Du Pont, 1998).

In summary, conceptual models, such as the SDT, provide empirical frameworks for the exploration and conseptualisation of consumer behaviour, especially concerning social and psychological influences on (pro-environmental and social) consumer behaviour. Yet, these models require empirical testing and further development in circumstance-specific situations to establish their relevance (Jackson, 2005). The aim and theoretical contribution of this study were therefore focused on establishing a model that elucidates the relationship between affluent consumers' satisfaction with life, their overall subjective well-being and their subsequent consideration of future consequences in their pre-evaluation and selection of white goods. Furthermore, the key constructs and behaviour under investigation were framed within the contextually specific environment of South Africa.

The study used elements of the SDT as a departure point for the theoretical underpinning of the proposed model, particularly due to the concepts of human motivation within the social context that relates to individual well-being. The SDT proposes that people are inherently motivated to behave in a manner that is beneficial for negotiating through a social world. The social context allows individuals to satisfy innate psychological needs for self-determination through internalization and integration (Deci et al., 1994). The section to follow will provide greater clarity in terms of the key constructs and particular construct associations that were deemed relevant in establishing the proposed model for this study.

3. Conceptual development

3.1 Satisfaction with life and subjective well-being

The first important construct association specified in the proposed model for this study is the connection between satisfaction with life and the sub-dimensions of subjective well-being, including environmental well-being and social contribution. Satisfaction with life is seen as a distinct construct that represents a cognitive and overall evaluation of quality of life as a whole and correlates with affective components of subjective well-being (Pavot et al., 2008). Subjective well-being has been the topic of investigation in many different domains and has therefore also been interpreted in many different ways. For this study, it may be seen as a person's self-reported evaluation of the overall quality of his/her life in a manner that is favourable (Diener, 1994). Subjective well-being is thus multi-faceted, and also closely related to the concept of satisfaction with life as both concepts encompass a dimension that underscores the quality of life.

A question that comes to the fore is how satisfaction with life and subjective well-being relate to the concept of happiness? In applying some of the underlying assumptions of the SDT, a distinction can be made between happiness as a hedonic construct and eudaimonia as a more enduring pursuit of satisfaction with life (seeing that motivation of choice within the social context is self-determined). Eudaimonia refers to a way of living that focuses on what is intrinsically worthwhile to humans, implying that there are universal intrinsic values built into human nature (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Contrarily, happiness may include a hedonic pursuit

of momentary pleasure, which is not necessarily sustainable and/or beneficial to a person in the long term (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener, 1994). For example, increased consumption may cause hedonic (momentary) pleasure, but it is not sustainable and may have severe negative consequences for both a consumer and for the environment in the long term. According to the World Happiness Report (WHR) of 2013, South Africa ranked 96th out of 156 countries on the scale, even though conditions improved as well as the increase in levels of consumption among certain segments of the population. The report further highlighted that the level of subjective well-being of the overall population declined for the period 2010–2012, which was specifically attributed to the social inequalities of the population (Helliwell et al., 2013). The rating has since declined even further with the most recent 2020 report ranking South Africa 109th out of a total of 153 countries that were surveyed for the 2017–2019 period (Helliwell et al., 2020). The WHR is not conducted in every country on an annual basis, therefore the ranking post-covid for all nations are not available yet, however, South Africa currently ranks 91st out of 146 countries, while the report states that although the GDP per capita grew the fastest in Asia, followed by Africa, the growth in worry, sadness and anger have been the greatest in sub-Saharan Africa, also experiencing the largest increase in income inequality (Helliwell et al., 2022).

Satisfaction with life, on the other hand, is considered as an enduring pursuit of eudaimonia that encompasses, but is not limited to, the concept of happiness and rejects an exclusive hedonic approach to achieving overall subjective well-being by engaging in activities that are purely focused on maximizing momentary pleasure. The point made is that consumers who embrace eudaimonia and long-term pursuits of satisfaction with life and subjective well-being may be more inclined to assess the future consequences of their consumption choices rather than prioritize more immediate gratification. (Christie et al., 2016)

In terms of subjective well-being, the construct includes various underlying sub-dimensions such as, economic well-being, environmental well-being and social well-being (O'Connel et al., 2013). Social well-being, in particular, is a complex concept and is comprised of various indicators such as social integration (i.e. quality of a person's relationship with the greater community), social acceptance (i.e. a societal understanding through the character and qualities of others), social contribution (i.e. beliefs surrounding one's importance and contribution as a member of society), social actualization (i.e. an evaluation of the potential and the trajectory of society) as well as social coherence (i.e. the perception of the quality, organization and operation of the social world; Keyes, 1998). In a recent South African study (Christie, 2017), the social contribution was found to be the most prominent social well-being indicator that respondents identified with. Son and Wilson (2012) explain that in the pursuit of satisfaction with life, a socially valued role in society will aid in strengthening one's sense of personal identity. The concept of social contribution may therefore reflect how people find value in themselves as well as in society at large in their contribution towards social welfare (Son et al., 2012; Keyes, 1998). The social contribution could then also fulfil a key role in the overall pursuit of sustainability. When consumers consider themselves members of a collective society, they may very well consciously decide to make consumption decisions that consider the greater environmental impact of their choices, not only as a deliberation for individual current circumstances but also for that of the larger community and future generations that will be most impacted by the current unsustainable use of natural resources (Heath et al., 2012).

Concerning environmental well-being, it is said that values such as the desirability of restricting growth, protection of the integrity of ecosystems and living in harmony with nature are evident in people who have favourable environmental well-being (Roberts & Bacon, 1997). According to Dietz et al. (2009), the results of human consumption on environmental well-being can be seen as the subsequent degradation of the environment based on consumption actions. The authors go on to mention that there is a specific relationship

between environmental well-being and sustainability, by defining sustainability as the 'efficiency with which human well-being is produced from the use of resources, including the environment. Higher efficiency implies greater sustainability.'

The third dimension of a person's overall subjective well-being, namely economic well-being, is an important concept particularly in a developing economy South Africa. Research suggests that people vary in their individual pursuits of well-being, and also specifically economic well-being (Seligman et al., 2005). Money is an essential part of survival and therefore tends to be more important for the poor and middle-class person than to someone wealthy. This is because an increase in income will have a greater impact on a poorer person, whereas a surge in income will not impact the lifestyle of a wealthy person as much (Lambert, 2007). Similarly, levels of subjective well-being are remarkably lower among the very poor; however, as a sufficient level of income is achieved, an increase theirin will not provide a greater level of well-being (Myers, 2000). Lower well-being might also rest on the premise that it has to do with objective changes in opportunities for resources or services. Higher incomes might allow for a more efficient use of natural resources, and when such resources are common access, the raise in income and the use of the resources might result in a reduced availability for the less wealthy (Reyes-Garcia et al., 2016). It is thus argued that human well-being correlates with economic prosperity, but beyond a certain point of economic affluence, such a correlation diminishes (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Inglehart, 2000). For these reasons, when assessing the subjective well-being of more affluent consumers, the focus tends to shift more towards the environmental- and social indicators of well-being.

Based on the aforementioned insights, it is apparent that there is a close relationship between satisfaction with life, subjective well-being, and also more specifically the environmental- and social sub-dimensions of subjective well-being for those who have already attained a certain level of economic prosperity. These associations pave the way towards the formulation of hypotheses. In terms of the construct associations highlighted in this section, it is postulated that for affluent consumers:

> Hypothesis 1 (H1): Satisfaction with life is positively associated with environmental well-being (H1a) and social contribution (as a dimension of social well-being) (H1b)

To summarize, this section brought to light that a eudaimonic pursuit of satisfaction with life (i.e. the ethical pursuit of long-term well-being) is undertaken to ensure a way of living that is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings as opposed to a hedonic pursuit of happiness (i.e. momentarily pursuit of self-gratification; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener, 1994). Such an approach may contribute to enhanced levels of environmental well-being and social contribution which, in turn, may inspire consumers' conscientious decision-making that may involve a more intense reflection surrounding the future, long-term consequences of the choices that are made.

3.2. Conscientious decision-making in the white goods industry

A key issue that underscores both United Nations' SDGs (2015) and South Africa's national development plan is the need for a combined effort among all sectors of society to actively pursue sustainable development with the accompanying mindset and behavioural changes in terms of ownership and agency (Statistics South Africa (STATS SA), 2017). The argument put forward is that governments can put policies and programmes into place as a means to curb overconsumption, but this problem should be addressed on an individual consumer level (Heath et al., 2012; Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014; Steg & Vlek, 2009) by, amongst other, promoting conscientious decision-making. Following the theoretical underpinnings of this study, human agency is seen to be intentional and characterized by forethought, self-

regulation, self-reactive influence and self-reflection regarding individual capabilities, qualities of functioning and the meaning and purpose of individual pursuits (Bandura, 2001). In response to sustainable development goals that are promoted within the broader community, the individual consumer may, for example, consider the impact of his/her consumption choices and through self-reflection exercise deliberate effort to preserve natural resources by selecting products that have a reduced environmental impact of which household appliances are a prime example.

The South African household appliance industry, which is also known as the white goods industry, is one of the most rapid growing industries in the country (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2012; McCollough, 2009; Erasmus et al., 2005). For 2021 the revenue in the household appliance industry segment in South Africa is projected to reach US$247 milion, with an annual growth rate of 7.1% up to 2025 (Statista, 2021). With the country's increasing middle-class consumer came the escalation of the consumption of white goods. Although many may be purchasing such appliances for the first time, the questions also remain as to how long they retain such appliances before replacing them. Technological advancements of the appliance industry are rendering appliances outdated much sooner than previously experienced (Hamilton & Richard, 2005:20), which have contributed to the growth of this industry. Also, globalization has significantly increased the availability of goods in the local sector with the constant introduction of novel innovations in a bid to increase sales and align local demand with international trends. Altogether, this has led to remarkable increases in the consumption of natural resources, as manifested in worldwide energy (Du Pont, 1998) and water crisis (World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 2014). The recent national energy predicament (DuPlessis & Randewijk, 2014; Inglesi, 2010; Inglesi-Lotz, 2011; Lombard & Ferreira, 2015; Pollet et al., 2015) and water scarcity and/or shortage problems (Binns et al., 2001; Sadr et al., 2015), also referred to as a water crisis (The Water Project, 2016) should serve as encouragement for consumers to consider the future consequences of their consumption decisions. This should be done especially regarding white goods, since appliances – despite their value in replacing manual labour in typical routine tasks – have several implications for an individual on economic (e.g., long term financial commitments for the household), environmental (e.g., increased energy and water consumption) and social levels (e.g., consumption decisions that shape and maintain a person's self-identity and social status; Erasmus et al., 2005; Girling-Budd, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Du Pont, 1998). A consideration of the future long-term consequences of acquiring such appliances is thus essential.

'Consideration of future consequences' is a construct first introduced by Strathman et al. (1994), and relates to the 'extent to which people consider distant versus immediate consequences of potential behaviors'. As explained by the authors, individuals are not the same in the manner that they consider the future outcomes of their choice relating to their current behaviour. On the one side of the continuum, some believe certain choices are worthwhile making because of the associated future benefits (regardless whether it entails immediate additional costs or sacrifice). Individuals at the other end of the continuum prioritize immediate benefits at the expense or cost of benefits that may not transpire immediately (Strathman et al., 1994). The following example may illustrate the point: Environmentally friendly white goods have in most industries and most product categories been priced at a premium over the conventional product offerings, especially in the major household appliance category (Erasmus et al., 2002; Peattie et al., 2005). Yet, future rewards offered by these environmentally friendly options are often highly beneficial for the consumer regarding long-term economic and energy savings. This should inspire consumers to delay immediate gratification that is achieved through the purchase of conventional non-environmentally friendly and cheaper household appliances. By rather opting for the more expensive, 'greener' appliance, the consumer's ecological footprint is reduced and

simultaneously, long-term economic savings are achieved through a reduction in resource consumption and thereby exhibiting conscientious decision-making.

Following through on the prior example, one might argue that selecting a greener option (or even delaying an immediate purchase due to affordability or unavailability of such an alternative) may be purely utilitarian in wanting to achieve economic savings. Regardless of the underlying motive, the decision remains based on future consequences (albeit economic, environmental and/or social) that are factored into the temporal orientation and as a byproduct, achieves a reduction in natural resources, ultimately benefitting the environment and the larger community. Although several other factors (apart from those mentioned above) can impact a decision to opt for environmentally friendly alternatives, it may be reasonable to assume that consumers who demonstrate higher levels of environmental well-being (with the associated willingness to protect the integrity of ecosystems as explained under section 1.1) may be more inclined to consider the future long-term consequences of their choices, especially in terms of environmental impact.

On the other end of the continuum, consumers who are strongly influenced by more concrete immediate outcomes may be less perturbed by looming consequences that result from resource depletion and the gradual deterioration of the natural environment (Strathman et al., 1994). Although their decisions may also involve a certain level of conscious forethought, it typically relates to more immediate outcomes, e.g. acquiring an appliance that is affordable and functional regardless of environmentally friendly features. Being focused on more immediate outcomes, considerations such as the amount of energy and other resources that an appliance uses throughout its lifespan are of less consequence and often discounted (Hill et al., 2008). Such an approach contradicts the inherent traits that accompany a sense of environmental well-being. Based on the aforementioned (with specific reference to affluent consumers who are in the process of acquiring white goods) the following hypotheses were formulated:

> Hypothesis 2 (H2): Environmental well-being is positively associated with a consideration of future consequences (H2a) and negatively associated with the prioritisation of immediate (non-environmental) consequences (H2b).

Similarly, when consumers are conscious of their value in society at large Keyes,1998) and consider themselves members of a collective society (i.e. social contribution) they may engage in decision-making that takes into account the long term environmental impact of their choices on the broader community and future generations. Based on the theoretical underpinning of this study, the personal agency does not operate in isolation but rather within a social setting and is influenced by socio-cultural aspects (Bandura, 2001) such as those found within the larger South African consumer community. People are therefore the producers as well as the products of these social systems and need to act conjointly on shared belief systems. Unfortunately, society has to large extent, through social pressure, created a culture where consumption beyond a point of actual need is acceptable and actively pursued by some consumer segments in the search of success and happiness (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Heath et al., 2012; McCollough, 2009). Miller (2008) explains that members of a population are in varying degrees responsible for the results of the practices that they follow which influence the other members of that population group. In 2006, Rosenberg reported that a select few of the total population is responsible for more than half of the overall consumption of South Africa (Rosenberg, 2006). This has however increased further, with 10% of the population accounting for 80% of the country's wealth in 2022 reiterating the position that South Africa has the highest income inequality worldwide (The World Bank, 2022). This disparity requires sensitizing consumers towards consideration for future consequences as opposed to a more materialistic approach of immediate gratification and overconsumption (Christie et al., 2016). In the context of

acquiring household appliances, it may be argued that consumers' who recognize their contribution within the larger community may be more inclined to consider the future long-term consequences of acquiring resource-intensive appliances that impact natural reserves, and by implication current and future generations. Conversely, they may reject options that address more immediate concerns that oppose the contribution they can make towards achieving the sustainable goals of the collective community. The following hypotheses were thus formulated:

> Hypothesis 3 (H3): Social contribution is positively associated with a consideration of future consequences (H3a) and negatively associated with the prioritisation of immediate (non-environmental) consequences (H3b).

To conclude the preceding conceptual background, Figure 1 depicts the key construct and construct associations that were postulated.
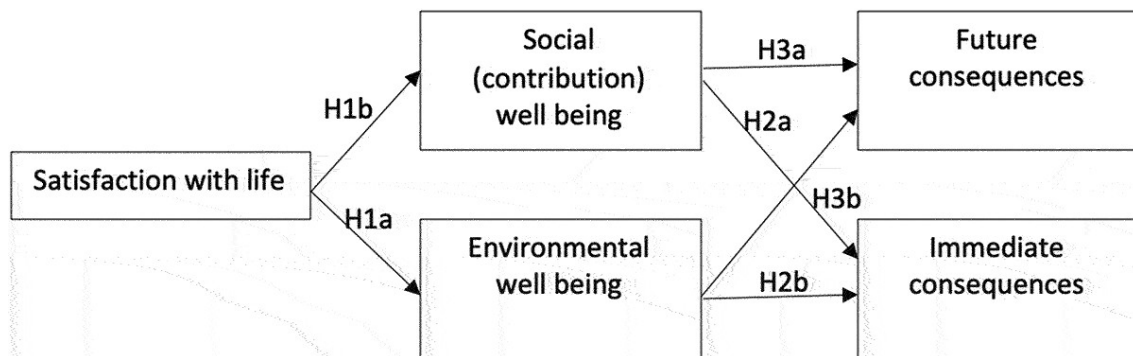

Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

While it is acknowledged that several other intrinsic (e.g., societal norms, values, attitudes and beliefs) and extrinsic factors (e.g., availability and affordability of products) may impact a consumers' conscientious decision-making (especially within the complex milieu of the South African emerging economy), the variables included in the proposed conceptual framework of this study attempted to present a distinct, parsimonious perspective on construct associations that have not yet been extensively explored in current literature and that, simultaneously, lends itself to empirical testing using structural equation modelling.

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Research paradigm

The study followed a positivist paradigm incorporating a quantitative survey-based approach. The research can further be classified as explanatory, which was deemed most appropriate in testing the proposed hypotheses of the study and establishing a conceptual model. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect relevant information to address the study's aim. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to develop a model signifying fac2012tors that may contribute to consumers' conscientious decision-making in the South African white goods industry.

4.2 Data collection instrument

The survey instrument used was a questionnaire, which consisted of structured sections and included four-point Likert scales with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A neutral response option was not included to persuade respondents to be

decisive in their responses. Furthermore, the four-point Likert scale was also introduced (as opposed to a five or seven-point scale), to simplify the questionnaire including that of the possible response options. The questionnaire consisted of various sections that were adapted for the South African context as well as the topic of investigation. The specific scale items that were used to measure each concept are listed in

and were patterned after Diener (1994) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Fisher's (2010) Environmental Well-Being Scale (Fisher, 2010), Keyes (1998, 2007) Social Well-Being Scale (in particular items that measure 'social contribution') and Strathman et al.'s (1994) Consideration for Future Consequence Scale that measures respondents' prioritization of immediate versus more distant outcomes of their behaviour. While the original scales included more items than listed in Table 1, several were eliminated during the initial scale reliability analysis and further factor analysis merely included items that ensured adequate discriminant and convergent validity for the concepts in question and which would result in good model fit. As pointed out by Iacobucci (2010) in her recommendations for building and testing structural equation models: ideally, each construct would be measured by three indicator variables, although it would be acceptable if a few are measured by less – four or more indicator variables per construct may become excessive.

Table 1. Standardized factor loadings of latent variables.

Latent variable items	Factor loadings
Satisfaction with life	
I am satisfied with my life	.859
In most ways, my life is close to my ideal	.773
The conditions of my life are excellent	.769
So far I have acquired the important things I want in life	.694
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	.552
Environmental well-being: *In my personal experience, I mostly*	
experience harmony with the environment	.884
develop a sense of oneness with nature	.870
develop a connection with nature	.690
develop a sense of wonder in natural surroundings	.681
Social (contribution) well-being	
I have important contributions to make to society	.793
I make worthwhile contributions to the community	.788
I have something valuable to give to the world	.676
Future consequences	
My choice of appliances is generally influenced by future environmental consequences	.794
When I make a purchase decision such as buying a washing machine, I think about how it might affect me in the future	.765
Immediate consequences	
I only act to satisfy immediate use/consumption concerns, figuring the future will take care of itself	.815
I only act to satisfy immediate concerns, figuring that I will take care of future problems that may occur at a later date	.536
My behaviour is only influenced by the immediate (i.e. a matter of days or weeks) outcomes of my actions	.761

4.3 Units of analysis

This study specifically focused on the South African affluent consumer. Therefore, the participant information for the current project are consumers who are responsible for the greater part of consumption in South Africa (Rosenberg, 2006) and, as urban dwellers are more likely to contribute to the country's ecological footprint in terms of lifestyle and consumption choices.

4.4 Data collection and analysis

The sampling strategy made use of purposive sampling via a store intercept approach in a prominent household appliance retail outlet in an upmarket suburb in Johannesburg, Gauteng. Since these consumers were in the correct frame of mind to answer questions about conscientious decision-making in the white goods industry. An instore intercept approach was used, whereby respondents completed a hard-copy questionnaire whilst waiting for their purchases to be finalized in the store. The sample was, however, supplemented with snowball sampling in order to achieve a statistically significant sample, by using rigidly stipulated sampling criteria. An electronic version of the questionnaire was also made available, and the respondents recruited via the purposeful sampling were asked to refer potential respondents. Al the relevant contact information was available on the consent sheet that the respondents were provided with. Data gathering took place for 3 months in 2016. The final sample included 320 respondents. Three stages of data analysis were implemented, i.e. descriptive statistics; principal component analysis, followed by confirmatory factor analysis and lastly, the third stage resulted in the development of a structural equation model to test the aim of the study. Strict adherence to principles of reliability and validity was undertaken throughout the entire process. Furthermore, ethical aspects of social research were considered at all times, with ethical permission granted from the relevant institution, as well as retail store. Additional ethics principles were kept in mind, aiming chiefly to avoid harm and to provide valuable research that is warranted and, more so, needed.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic profile

Of the total 320 respondents, the majority were female (65%) and between 30 and 60 years of age (66%). As pointed out by Hamilton and Richard (2005:154–155), consumers who belong to this age group may value alternative measures of well-being (apart from economic well-being) and potentially prioritize the future consequences of their consumption decisions. The preponderant racial group was White (74%), followed by Black respondents (22%) and Others (4%), which included Coloured and Indian respondents. Only 3% did not finish their High School qualification, while 17% obtained a High School certificate and the other 79% had either a diploma or degree and some instances also a postgraduate qualification in addition to their basic High School certificates. The respondents all belonged to affluent categories and were mostly employed (92%). The remaining 8% who were unemployed may be explained as either a stay-at-home wife or husband whose spouse generates enough income to warrant their unemployment and/or retired persons with pensions that allow them to be categorized as affluent. Respondents' households averaged three members. The majority were married or living with a partner (65%), while the remainder were single, divorced, separated or widowed (35%). Thus, two-thirds of the sample had to consider the needs of others while making consumption decisions. Most respondents (64%) resided in the Gauteng area (Table 2). For the year 2012 up to 2013, 43% of the respondents purchased white goods; from 2013 up to the beginning of 2014, 29% of the respondents made such purchases, while for the interval 2014 to 2015, 26% of the respondents purchased white goods. However, it should be noted that all of the respondents indicated that they already owned white goods such as microwaves, refrigerators and freezers, ovens, dishwashers, washing machines, stoves and tumble dryers before these purchases.

Table 2. Demographic profile.

Demographic variable		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	112	35
	Female	208	65
Age	19–39	131	42
	40–65	163	52
	Over 65	26	6
Ethnic affiliation	White	235	74
	Black	69	22
	Coloured, Indian and other	15	4
Education level	Lower than matric/Grade 12	10	3
	Matric/Grade 12	54	17
	Grade 12 + Degree/Diploma	253	79
Employment status	Employed	295	92
	Unemployed	25	8
Marital status	Married/living with a partner	208	65
	Single/divorced/separated/widow(er)	112	35
Number of household occupants	1	42	13
	2	88	29
	3	72	23
	4	63	20
	5 or more	51	15
Area of residence	Gauteng	202	64
	Other metropolises	114	36

5.2 Structural equation modelling

Structural equation modelling involves the use of factor analysis to measure latent constructs through manifest indicators, while concurrently estimating various regression equations. This method is well suited to test theoretically driven models that explain consumer behaviour (Mazzocchi, 2008:316) and was, therefore, the optimum choice with which to pursue the specification of a model that reflects the construct associations presented in the conceptual background of this paper.

Following initial item reduction procedures, the retained satisfaction with life, environmental well-being, social contribution, future and immediate consequence variables were composed as a measurement model and evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table 1 summarizes the variables along with the CFA results with all factor loadings above the threshold of .45. No modifications were applied. The model fit the data well with fit indices reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Model fit indices of the measurement model.

	x^2	df	P	x^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	PCLOSE
Goodness of fit criterion				≤5	<.07	≥.95	≥.95	>.5
Measurement model	128.951	109	.093	1.183	.024	.956	.990	.999

Correlations, means, standard deviations and Cronbach's α for the latent variables are summarized in Table 4. The means indicate that respondents agree with statements regarding satisfaction with life, environmental well-being, social contribution and their consideration for future consequences. Evidently, respondents are satisfied with life, manifest levels of environmental- and social contribution, consider the future consequences of their decision-making and seem less likely to prioritize immediate consequences in their pre-purchase evaluation and selection of white goods.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations.

Latent variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Satisfaction with life	2.96	0.73	0.84	-				
(2) Environmental well-being	3.18	0.62	0.86	.190	-			
(3) Social (contribution) well-being	3.06	0.55	0.80	.167	.210	-		
(4) Future consequences	2.84	0.66	-	.118	.307	.194	-	
(5) Immediate consequences	2.12	0.65	0.75	−.113	−.146	−.108	−.195	-

[a]Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha, α is not reported for future consequences, as only two scale items were used to define the latent variable in the structural equation model

Correlations between satisfaction with life, environmental well-being, social contribution (as a dimension of social well-being), a consideration of future consequences and immediate consequences were low, thus pointing towards discriminant validity between the constructs in question, which is imperative for the specification of a structural equation model. A structural model which approximates the construct associations identified in the hypothesized model, namely satisfaction with life, social contribution, environmental well-being, future consequences and immediate consequences as presented in the initial proposed model was configured and tested. Based on a maximum-likelihood estimation with raw data as input the model's overall fit to the data
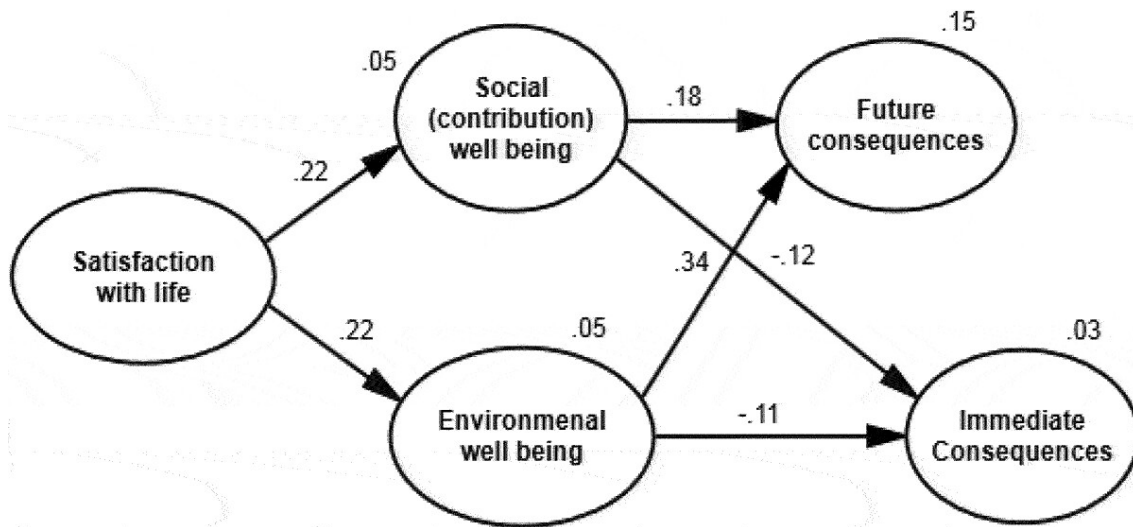
The SEM model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Factors influencing consumers' conscientious decision-making in the South African white goods industry.

What can be gathered from the model depicted in Figure 2, is that satisfaction with life explained on average 5% of the variance for both the social contribution dimension of social well-being and that of environmental well-being which may not be considered as 'high'. Furthermore, the variance explained for future consideration (15%) was higher than that for respondents' consideration of immediate consequences (3%). The model fit indices fro Figure 2, is presented in Table 5. As summarized in Table 6, all of the hypotheses were supported by the data. All path coefficients were positive and statistically significant ($p <$ .001). Satisfaction with life is an equally strong predictor of the social contribution dimension of social well-being (β = .220, $p <$ .001) and environmental well-being (β = .220, $p <$ .001). Environmental well-being is the strongest predictor of a consideration for future environmental consequences (β = .337, $p <$ .001), although social contribution may also

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predict a consideration for future consequences (β = .182, p < .001) although to a lesser extent. As anticipated there is a negative association between environmental well-being and respondents' consideration of immediate non-environmental consequences (β = −.106, p < .001). Similarly, a negative relationship exists between the social contribution dimension of social well-being and respondents' consideration for immediate consequences (β = −.117, p < .001).

Table 5. Model fit indices – SEM model.

	χ^2	Df	P	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	PCLOSE
Goodness of fit criterion				≤5	<.07	≥.95	≥.95	>.5
SEM model	147.320	113	.017	1.304	.031	.949	.983	.994

Table 6. Confirmation of hypotheses through SEM analysis.

Hypotheses	Standardized regression β	Significance p	Supported
H1a: Satisfaction with life → Environmental well-being	.220	<.001	Yes
H1b: Satisfaction with life → Social (contribution) well-being	.220	<.001	Yes
H2a: Environmental well-being → Future consequences	.337	<.001	Yes
H2b: Environmental well-being → Immediate consequences	−.106	<.001	Yes
H3a: Social (contribution) well-being → Future consequences	.182	<.001	Yes
H3b: Social (contribution) well-being → Immediate consequences	−.117	<.001	Yes

6. Discussion

According to Ryan and Deci (2000) as well as Ryan et al. (2006), a person who engages in meaningful endeavours, i.e. pursuit of eudaimonia, will subsequently experience happiness and pleasure as well. The authors go on to mention that living well should reflect in decision-making and voluntarily behaving in a manner that realizes the highest human natures. Satisfaction with life for a person will therefore influence a person's perceived subjective well-being. If such satisfaction with life is deemed favourable, it is assumed that a person's subjective well-being will also be favourable. Based on the SDT, social cognition and the consumer's belief system should therefore equate to conscientious decision-making to promote well-being on an individual as well as on a national level as opposed to a hedonic pursuit of momentarily pleasure (Christie et al., 2016).

Thus, it can be deduced that these urban affluent respondents experience satisfaction with life, which translates into a significantly positive relationship between the social contribution dimension of social well-being and a significantly positive relationship with environmental well-being. Furthermore, these consumers' environmental well-being translates into a significant positive relationship regarding future consideration and a significant negative relationship with immediate concerns. Reaffirming that a favourable concept of environmental well-being will strengthen a consumer's consideration for the future consequences of their consumption decisions. Furthermore, the respondents' social well-being, and more specifically their social contribution may also influence their consideration of future consequences in the evaluation and selection of white goods. As will be further elaborated on in the conclusion, various stakeholders in industry and government should thus take note that to promote sustainable alternatives, pro-environmental attributes of white goods and the long-term benefits associated with such features can be emphasized, but focus could also be devoted towards the social aspects of consumption choices.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Theoretical contribution and implications

In recent years, a shift has been undertaken to determine a country's progress based on encompassing measurements of well-being other than economic prosperity alone (Ura et al., 2012). This measurement includes aspects such as economic, environmental and social well-being. In order to promote sustainable prosperity for a country and its people, emerging economies (including South Africa) cannot continue to omit such an all-embracing approach (Helliwell et al., 2022; Jackson, 2005). Where studies within the context of a developing economy have been undertaken to determine sustainability-related aspects of consumerism (Brits, 2015; Hamilton, 2014; Taljaard, 2015), it has generally been with the assumptions that accompany the theoretical underpinning of First World nations. Despite the interest shown in this topic, neglecting to take into account the very specific contextual complexities of a developing economy, like South Africa, may be erroneous (Mittelman, n.d.). Furthermore, the impact that consumption of white goods, in particular, has on the environment, as well as the consumption repercussions for the individual (McCollough, 2009) along with the proliferation of this industry (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2012), make this a vital topic for enquiry.

To investigate affluent consumers' satisfaction with life, which may ultimately manifest in the cognitive evaluation and selection of white goods in an emerging economy, evidence is needed that takes into account the diversity and dynamics specifically found in South Africa. The theoretical contribution is therefore to create an understanding between subjective well-being and consumption. A more encompassing measurement of prosperity for a country's people is thus required in a setting where the focus is mostly on the eradication of poverty and the growth of the economy. The theoretical implications of the study are to provide information, through this understanding, overconsumption, as an aspect of affluenza may be mitigated by promoting sustainable well-being on an individual and a national level. Economic well-being on an individual level will ensure financial wellness for a person which will, in turn, promote consideration for resource consumption, as reflected in environmental well-being, which will promote social integration, acceptance, contribution, actualization and coherence, resulting in social well-being for the individual consumer.

7.2 Managerial and policy implications

The managerial and policy implications of the project provide the industry with the opportunity to promote responsible consumption through policy implementation, addressing consumer needs by incorporating principles such as Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) nudge theory (i.e. to nudge consumers to choose options that will assist in immediate and future well-being). Since consumers learn and behave through mimicry (Jackson, 2005) such policies and practices must be put into place for the more affluent consumers initially but also implemented for all social strata within the country. This will then in turn serve to encourage the emerging middle-class consumer to behave voluntarily in the same manner, through copying such behaviours while later directing the consumer's behaviour to choose such an option. Since individual consumption patterns will contribute to overall national sustainability (Heath et al., 2012), this behaviour should trickle down to all social strata of the country to improve individual and national well-being.

7.3 Future research direction

In terms of future research implications, the opportunity presents itself to further expand literature regarding an encompassing approach to consumption, as a means to enhance satisfaction with life and subjective well-being from a contextually specific emerging

economy's point of view. For this study, white goods served as a prime example of a product category that draws together key constructs such as satisfaction with life and subjective well-being in consumers' decision-making. Ethnographic studies with a grounded theory approach may be of particular value in this regard in terms of revealing more insight into consumers' views on the matter. Also, qualitative research, and or mixed-method studies that gather data from multiple sources and perspectives could potentially reduce systematic bias and achieve triangulation by collecting data from different sources. It might also be insightful to conduct the study again, post-Covid, seeing as though this period had a profound effect on the population's well-being. Additionally, it will be interesting to determine whether aspects such as the Earth summit, Stop-Oil and various other movements can influence the consumer's perspective to focus on a more encompassing measurement of well-being, and by implication foster a concern for future consequences of their consumption choices.

7.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, current reports indicate that the white goods sector is one of the fastest-growing industries in South Africa, with the potential to consume vast amounts of resources and therefore consumption decisions in this product category need to be made that consider future consequences of such decisions. This study should serve as a foundation to improve subjective well-being for all the citizens of a country while promoting a reduction in the quality of life discrepancy of such a country's people and therefore endorsing the sustainable development goals as an approach to achieving well-being.

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