



Marketing Science Institute Working Paper Series 2020  
Report No. 20-118

## On the Experience and Engineering of Consumer Pride, Consumer Excitement, and Consumer Relaxation in the Marketplace

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**On the Experience and Engineering of Consumer Pride, Consumer Excitement, and  
Consumer Relaxation in the Marketplace**

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November 14, 2019

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## Abstract

This article presents new conceptual and managerial insights about consumer experiences of positive emotions in the marketplace and how to engineer these emotional experiences for business purposes. Specifically, we provide an in-depth conceptual analysis of three positive emotions that are of high relevance for marketers: (1) consumer pride, (2) consumer excitement, and (3) consumer relaxation. Through a systematic deconstruction of numerous consumer accounts of emotional experiences, combined with a careful theoretical analysis, we (a) codify how these emotions typically arise in consumption contexts, (b) identify their primary drivers and moderators in marketplace settings, including retail environments, and (c) explain how these theoretical insights can be used to engineer pride, excitement, and relaxation in consumption journeys.

Whereas consumer behavior theory has historically been dominated by cognitive and “rational” models of consumer decision making (e.g., Alba and Hutchinson 1987; Bettman 1979; Bettman, Luce, and Payne 1998), a large body of research in the past 30 years clearly shows that feelings and emotions undoubtedly play a critical role in shaping various aspects of consumer behavior (e.g., Andrade and Cohen 2007; Luce 1998; Pham 1998; Pham and Chen 2019; Pham et al. 2001; Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). For instance, studies demonstrate that consumers’ preference for large product assortments is not solely driven by the better choice opportunities that larger assortments offer, but also by the subtle emotional pleasure that consumers derive from reviewing large product assortments (Aydinli, Gu, and Pham 2017). A large-scale study of consumer responses to more than 1,000 commercials revealed that as much as 10 percent of the variance in consumers’ brand attitudes can be attributed to the mere pleasantness of the feelings evoked by the commercials (Pham, Geuens, and de Pelsmacker 2010). In addition, states of relaxation can increase consumers’ willingness to pay for various retail products and services by about 11 percent (Pham, Hung, and Gorn 2011).

Given the substantial role that feelings and emotions play in consumer behavior and consumption experiences, it is surprising that these issues are not more systematically integrated in the way that marketing and business to consumers is taught in business schools and practiced in the real world. It is rather telling, for instance, that in the leading textbook on marketing—Kotler and Keller’s (2016) *Marketing Management*, now in its 15<sup>th</sup> edition with almost 600 pages of text—less than two pages are devoted to the subject of affect and feelings. Several reasons could account for the seeming disconnect between the large (and growing) body of findings on the role of feelings and emotions in consumer behavior, and the lack of attention to consumer feelings and emotions in mainstream marketing theory and practice. First, although consumer feelings and emotions have been studied for about 30 years, this body of research is still relatively recent compared to the broader history of marketing thought. Second, there has been little effort to systematically codify what is known about feelings and emotions in consumer behavior (for exceptions, see Cohen, Pham, and Andrade 2008; Chen and Pham 2019) and only limited attempts to translate this knowledge for marketing theory and practice. Third, research on the role of feelings and emotions in consumer behavior has predominantly focused on general effects of positive versus negative emotions, with little attention to important differences that exist among emotions of the same valence (e.g., pride vs. joy; anger vs. sadness) that are critical

in understanding consumer behavior in the marketplace (e.g., Kim, Park, and Schwarz 2010; see Raghunathan and Pham 1999). Finally, most research on feelings and emotions in consumer behavior focuses on their influences on judgment, decisions, and behavior—the *consequences* of feelings and emotions (see Cohen et al. 2008, for a review)—whereas from a marketing and business standpoint, it is at least as important to identify and understand the *antecedents* of feelings and emotions in the marketplace so that marketers, retailers, and advertisers can leverage such insights to shape consumers’ emotional experiences.

The purpose of this article is to help bridge the gap between what is known about consumers’ feelings and emotions, and marketing theory and practice, by making connections and generating fresh insights about some of the most important and relevant emotions that consumers experience in the marketplace through various personal consumption journeys (e.g., visiting a farmers market, buying a gift, buying a first home, having a romantic dinner at a restaurant, driving an environmentally friendly car, relaxing on a sunny beach). Whereas the psychological literature on emotion tends to focus on negative emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety, depression), we focus on positive emotions because they are more directly relevant for the creation of consumer value. In this article, we provide an original conceptual analysis of three specific positive emotions that are pervasive in consumption journeys: (1) consumer pride, (2) consumer excitement, and (3) consumer relaxation. These three emotions cover a broad spectrum of positive emotions, with pride being a prototypical self-focused emotion (i.e., a self-conscious emotion in which an appraisal of the self is prominent), excitement being a primarily object-focused emotion (i.e., an emotion typically directed at or elicited by a specific target, whether a person, an object, or a situation), and relaxation being a more general emotional state rather than a stimulus-specific emotion. For each of these emotions, we provide rich representative accounts of real-life consumption experiences, which we systematically deconstruct and theoretically analyze. This enables us to (a) codify how these emotions typically arise in consumption contexts, (b) identify their primary drivers and moderators in the marketplace, and (c) suggest how these insights can be leveraged to engineer particular emotional experiences for business purposes.

With respect to consumer pride, our research identifies four factors that are critical in marketplace settings: the perceived level of achievement, internal attributions, the projection of social status, and the presence of a social audience and positive feedback. We then discuss how

each of these four factors can be utilized to create or amplify consumer experiences of pride. With respect to excitement, our research uncovers three distinct forms of consumer excitement: anticipatory excitement prior to a focal experience, immersive excitement during the experience, and excitement upon the materialization of a certain outcome. For each form of excitement, we identify the main theoretical drivers and delineate how they can be used to generate and intensify consumer excitement. With respect to relaxation, we propose an original integrative model of consumer relaxation and discuss many practical implications of the model. A notable insight of the model is the novel concept of *relaxation hubs*, which are special places and objects that are potent cradles of relaxation.

### **Methodological Approach**

As one of the first theoretical attempts to study consumer emotions from this perspective, the analyses and findings reported in this article are mostly conceptual in nature and largely exploratory. In order to guide our conceptualization and explorations, we conducted a series of online surveys on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). In each survey, we recruited about 50 respondents and asked them to share a personal consumption experience that revolved around a particular emotion (e.g., pride, excitement, relaxation).<sup>1</sup> Participants were asked two main questions (reproduced here for pride):

- Think about a personal experience in which you felt a great sense of [**pride**] in a consumer or marketplace context. By “consumer or marketplace context,” we mean that your experience involved some products, services, and other things that people can buy or consume (e.g., shopping experiences, watching movies or videos, vacations, gifts, preparing or eating meals, viewing or doing sports, and so on). Focus on experiences that were particularly memorable and meaningful that really made you feel [**proud**].

Please describe in detail what happened that ended up making you feel particularly [**proud**] during that experience. Also, please provide enough background information so that someone who was not there can clearly visualize and understand your experience.

- Think back about the particular experience you just described. What were the factors, in particular, that were responsible for you experiencing genuine [**pride**]? In other words, what is it, specifically, about that situation that really made you feel [**proud**]?

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<sup>1</sup> Pilot tests had indicated that a sample size of 40–50 respondents per emotion, each describing in detail a particular experience, was sufficient to obtain rich qualitative insights about each emotion and reach theoretical saturation. Therefore, additional respondents would not materially change the insights uncovered in this research.

Responses to the first question were required to have at least 80 words, and responses to the second question were required to have at least 40 words. These questions were followed by a series of questions about respondents' age, gender, income, and other demographics. Respondents took an average of 14.6 minutes to complete the survey.

Each survey yielded an average of 48.5 usable sets of responses. These responses were content-analyzed independently by the two authors and further discussed with members of the first author's research lab. The method used was broadly consistent with the grounded theory approach recommended by Straus and Corbin (1994). Through an iterative process of analysis, categorization, and abstraction across responses provided for each emotion, combined with a review of the relevant theoretical literature, we arrived at a series of conceptual generalizations about the inner workings of each emotion in the marketplace. From these conceptualizations, we derived a series of managerial recommendations and retail-relevant insights for the engineering of each emotion. Our findings, insights, and recommendations are reported next.

## **Pride**

### The Psychology of Pride

An important class of positive emotional experiences pertains to feelings of pride. Pride is a self-conscious emotion that results from meeting some internalized standard (Tracy and Robins 2004a). This is the emotion a person typically experiences in response to significant personal achievements such as graduating from college, winning a sports competition, or announcing the birth of a child. Pride can also be experienced when engaging in meaningful altruistic behavior such as teaching a child how to read, hosting a charity event, or going on a military tour of duty (see Figure 1). As a result, pride is generally believed to foster positive behavior by strengthening people's motivation for achievements (Weidman, Tracy, and Elliot 2016; Weiner 1985), and to promote prosocial behavior by rewarding "doing the right thing" (Hart and Matsuba 2007; Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007; Williams and DeSteno 2009). These two sources of pride loosely align with a distinction sometimes made in regulatory-focus theory between two types of pride: "promotion pride," experienced in response to accomplishments, and

“prevention pride,” experienced in response to the fulfillment of duties and obligations (Higgins et al. 2001).<sup>2</sup>

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

According to Mascolo and Fischer (1995), feelings of pride are “generated by appraisals that one is responsible for a socially valued outcome or for being a socially valued person” (p. 66). This definition highlights three important aspects of pride. First, the emotion arises from an evaluation of the self (i.e., pride is a self-conscious emotion). Unlike other emotions such as anger or positive surprise in which attention is focused on an external object, pride is an emotion in which attention is largely directed at the self. Second, in experiences of pride the self is evaluated in relation to a standard—one that is generally social. For example, a person rarely takes pride in accomplishing things that are not socially valued (e.g., ability to excel at meaningless tasks). And third, the outcome that is the source of pride is attributed to the self; that is, pride involves self-attribution. One typically would not experience pride in response to achievements attributed to luck or to another person’s actions.

Tracy and Robins (2008) showed that the experience of pride has important expressive components that are readily recognized by outgroup members, even from other cultures (e.g., expanded posture; the raised arms of a victorious athlete). According to these authors, expressions of pride may have evolved as a signal of increased social status, and pride itself may be part of a system designed to maintain and promote social status—a significant evolutionary function for social animals. Consequently, a person’s sense of pride is closely related to his or her self-identity and group identity. Some of the most pride-worthy experiences are those that bring about a new self-identity: “I am an Olympian,” “I am a father,” “I am a doctor.” Not only is pride elicited by certain self-identities, pride itself can be used to reinforce one’s self-identity, as illustrated, for instance, by the Gay Pride movement and various national parades in New York City (e.g., Greek Independence Day parade; Puerto Rican Day parade, St. Patrick’s Day parade).

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of pride discussed here is known as *authentic* pride. It is distinguished from another form of pride, called *hubristic* pride, which involves inflated and self-aggrandizing views of the self (e.g., “I am the most charismatic manager in the company”; “I am the smartest student at school”). This latter form of pride is associated with narcissism and antisocial behavior (Lewis 2016; Tracy and Robins 2007). We do not discuss hubristic pride in this article because leveraging it for business purposes would raise ethical issues.

Pride is a common experience in the marketplace (Derbaix and Pham 1991). In our exploratory surveys, typical examples of situations that generate pride included purchasing a product for a very low price (getting a “great deal”) and finding an especially fitting gift, as exemplified by the following quotes:

- *I bought a Raspberry Pi computer for just 40 bucks that works fantastically for what I need, mainly web browsing and streaming. I was proud of this purchase because I got exactly what I needed for a very low price compared to everything else available in the marketplace. (Male, 32)*
- *...I purchased some nutcrackers and they were by Kurt Adler and absolutely gorgeous finish and quality. I bought these for my Aunt as she's a collector and she was so pleased with them.... What made me proud is that I was able to gift a loved one something she really loved and adored. (Male, 42)*

Consumers also derive pride from prosocial marketplace behavior, as illustrated by the examples below:

- *...in a nearby outlet.... There were some customers who were looking for a laptop but they didn't have even a clue about it.... I talked to them, and asked about their requirements, budget and all. Then I suggested some laptops...under their budget and also meeting their requirements.... Felt proud for selling a product to such customers.... I understood their expectation and their economic level, I saved their money and I made them happy.... It made me happy and also proud. (Male, 30)*
- *I felt a GREAT sense of PRIDE when I bought a new Prius. I felt this sense of pride because I felt as if I was doing something positive for the environment. I felt that I was setting a good example for my children, my neighbors, and my friends by showing them that I was concerned about reducing greenhouse gases. As I drove around in my Prius, I felt a lot of pride - especially as I drove by large gas-guzzling vehicles that were polluting the environment. (Male, 52)*

### Drivers and Moderators of Pride

*Perceived Achievement Level.* Given that a primary antecedent of pride is the self-attribution of an achievement, an obvious determinant of the intensity of a person's pride is the perceived magnitude of the achievement in the person's mind. This perceived magnitude is in turn a function of two main factors. The first is the level (or perceived difficulty) of the goal achieved (e.g., completing a marathon vs. a 10K race; winning a talent competition vs. coming in third). The second is the distance and obstacles that the person had to overcome to attain the goal (e.g., completing a marathon is a greater achievement for a 60-year-old retiree than it is for a 30-year-

old athlete; winning a spelling bee is a greater achievement for a nonnative speaker than it is for a native speaker). The following quotes are illustrative of the combined role of goal level (or difficulty) and distance from the goal in determining a consumer's pride:

- *The last time I felt [pride] was when I purchased my car. It is an Audi S4 which took me a long time to save up my money to buy it. The car has high prestige and cost a significant amount of money.... The price tag of the car was well in the 60K range out the door after all fees and taxes. I felt that it was a dream come true from years of hard work. It took me nearly 4 years of saving to purchase my dream ride. (Male, 39)*
- *I felt really proud when I bought my first home and was able to finally move into it. I had been saving up for five years to finally be able to purchase the home of my dreams and was able to put a large down payment on it, between all the overtime that I was putting in on my job and the overtime of my husband, we were able to proudly purchase our home in a very nice residential area. (Female, 48)*
- *I had been talking to an online friend for over a year and we finally decided to meet up halfway between our homes, which was in Washington DC. Neither of us had ever been there and we are both from smaller towns, so we felt a little uncomfortable using the public transportation system. I looked up all the information before we went about buying passes and what stops were closest to the landmarks we planned to visit, and was able to get us around pretty successfully on our trip without getting lost. I was pretty proud of that.... I think what made me most proud was that I had never done anything like that before, but I was able to figure it out pretty quickly. (Female, 58)*

*Internal Attribution.* Independent of the perceived magnitude of the person's achievement, a critical determinant of the experience of pride is an internal (as opposed to external) attribution of this achievement (Weiner, Russell, and Lerman 1979). According to Weiner's (1985) attributional theory of achievement, motivation, and emotion, internal attributions are more likely when people see themselves as having played a causal role in the achievement. Such perceptions are in turn a function of (a) whether the locus of causality lies in the person or elsewhere (e.g., Was the person the one who prepared the delicious dish that everyone is praising, or was this dish prepared by a caterer?), and (b) the degree of control that the person had over the resulting outcome (e.g., Did the person follow a precise recipe, or was the person simply lucky in preparing this meal?). Below are illustrative examples of internal attributions contributing to feelings of pride in consumption settings:

- *I went into a Walgreens a few years ago, with \$5 and a plan to try to get something for my son for his birthday. All he asked for was a stuffed tiger. After a few minutes in the store, I realized that there was a crazy good sale, and the store had points for product purchases.... I did several transactions until I had accumulated enough points to buy my*

*little guy the tiger he wanted. It was so great to know how to coupon and make my few dollars stretch like that...I was proud, because many people would not know how to make the deals work like that and get something for a little of nothing. I have studied for years to learn how to coupon and plan and get things for my family that I would not be able to afford otherwise. (Female, 45)*

- *I wanted a new bike so that I could really start my journey to a healthier, happier lifestyle. I felt pride in myself taking the time to look for the bike that I felt would fit me and my needs. I was looking for something specific, with the right height, gears, a place to hold my water bottle, a place to maybe hold a small camera and also to hold my phone so that I could listen to music while I worked out. (Female, 33)*

*Projected Social Status.* As previously noted, the experience of pride is closely linked to the acquisition and promotion of social status (Tracy and Robins 2008). Behaviors and achievements that elicit self-pride tend to be those that elevate the person's social standing in their relevant group. Scoring a decisive goal in a soccer match or the game-winning basket in a basketball game are particularly pride-inducing acts because they obviously raise the scoring player's standing within the team. Consequently, marketplace signals of status and social standing are common drivers of consumer pride:

- *I felt proud the first time I flew business class. I was coming back from a long business trip in China, and I had managed to earn more money than I usually do, so I rewarded myself with the luxury. I flew on Cathay Pacific. The status that the ticket afforded me made me feel great about myself, feel special. I was treated with extra respect and I enjoyed this. I felt like a better person than the person I normally am. (Male, 35)*
- *I feel like by owning the car (an Audi S4), it gives me a sense of acceptance. I feel as though I hold a high prestige among my peers to be able to own such a vehicle. I feel that by owning the car, I feel accomplished in terms of wealth and status. (Male, 39)*

The achievement and projection of social status can also be acquired vicariously through various forms of group affiliation, such as with a sports team, country, or brand:

- *I felt a lot of pride when I last attended a Packers football game. I felt pride in the team itself, and that that is my home state's team.... I felt very proud because the football team I was there to cheer on is one of the most famous and well know teams in the NFL. They have a great history and legacy and have had great players on the team throughout the years. (Female, 34)*
- *A recent...personal experience I had in which I felt a great sense of pride in a consumer or marketplace context is a recent trip to the cinema to see Aquaman. Aquaman is a recent release of the company DC Universe and it was mind blowing .... I felt proud about seeing the movie because it was American made. Starting from the cast to the*

*directors to the locations were all made here in America. I am proud to be a citizen with such great minds because I am sure the movie is going to win awards. (Male, 35)*

- *Nike to me gives me the pride feeling, I think it's because I've been a fan of their fashion sense since I was a little boy and now being grown up I still have a connection to the brand personally so that's my feelings with Nike. (Male, 27)*

*Social Audience and Positive Feedback.* Because pride is closely linked to the acquisition and promotion of social status (Tracy and Robins 2008), feelings of pride tend to be magnified when an achievement is witnessed by an audience and when it is positively reinforced by social feedback. A prototypical example is when an athlete breaks the world record in front of a fully packed stadium bursting with the crowd's loud applause and cheers. Below is a more everyday example documenting the amplifying role of audience and positive feedback in a consumption setting:

- *A new movie was released and I went to a movie theatre on the release date to watch it. It was a bit complicated and mysterious type movie. At one scene I sort of announced to myself loudly what's going to happen next. And it happened. People around me were surprised and admired me. They were discussing with their partners how I might have figured out. I felt pretty proud that people were impressed by me were discussing about me. It was a good moment. Other people discussing about me was what made me feel proud. It felt really good to know that they were talking to each other about me and praising my analytical skill. (Male, 25)*

Note that to amplify pride, the audience need not be physical: it could also be merely virtual or even imagined. This is one of the reasons why many eagerly share their various achievements on social media platforms such as Facebook, WeChat, or Instagram. Note also that a potent magnifier of pride, over and above the mere presence of an audience, is the positive feedback and approval that the audience, or other members of valued social groups, may provide about the person's behavior or achievement. The role that virtual audiences and positive feedback play in pride is well illustrated in the following account of a business-class travel experience:

- *I felt pride because of the way people thought about me. While you can't necessarily tell a lot just from appearance, I felt like people assumed I was someone special, or competent, or successful due to the ticket that I had purchased. (Male, 35)*

An audience and positive social feedback are less important in pride-inducing experiences that are based on altruistic and prosocial behavior. For such experiences, the private awareness of doing or having done "the right thing" may be sufficient. For instance, making a charitable

contribution may bring feelings of pride even if the contribution is made privately or anonymously. Below is an example of a consumer sharing her pride about buying clothes from a sustainability-oriented company:

- *I recently...decided to buy from the clothing brand reformation. Their clothes are pretty expensive compared to the fast fashion I could buy for similar styles, but I strongly believed in the way they ran their company and wanted to support it. They are very green focused, invest their money back into environmental efforts, practice sustainability, track their carbon footprint and send it to you quarterly in reports of their efforts and progress. After obtaining my dresses from them, I could see the high quality work in the fabric and was very proud of myself for supporting a company with this high ethical code.... I was proud that I made a conscious effort to think beyond price and to support businesses that practice transparency and green efforts. (Female, 28)*

### Propositions on the Engineering of Pride

The preceding observations and findings about the psychology of pride and its moderators summarized in Figure 1 offer interesting and actionable clues about how firms may be able to engineer or amplify feelings of pride in the marketplace including in retail settings. The most common tactic is to provide consumers with physical markers of personal achievement and prosocial behavior. For personal achievements, classic examples include medals, trophies, and diplomas, whereas for prosocial behaviors, typical examples include “I voted” pins, “I donated blood” stickers, and “volunteer” t-shirts. In retail settings, this practice is common, for instance, in laser-tag centers, which post the players’ shooting performance on scoreboards and issue printed certificates of shooting performance after the session. A less obvious tactic revolves around increasing consumers’ perceptions of personal achievements. General Mills’s famous recommendation that consumers add an egg in the batter when baking with Betty Crocker cake mixes, thereby boosting consumers’ sense of accomplishment when using the product, is a classic example of such a tactic (Boyd 2014). Perceptions of achievement may also be enhanced by promoting pseudo-achievement metrics, as American Express does by printing an effectively meaningless “member since” date on every member’s card. Another means of influencing consumers’ perceptions of achievement is using a tiered structure of achievements, with lower levels being relatively easy to attain (e.g., Delta Airlines’ “Silver” Medallion status), and higher levels being increasingly difficult to achieve (e.g., Delta’s “Gold,” “Platinum,” and “Diamond” Medallion status). An airline may additionally praise its most loyal flyers with a video montage of all the places they have travelled to in the past year on their way to achieving their high

mileage status. In retail settings, a classic example of pride-inducing recognition for pseudo-achievement is Foursquare's awarding of the title of "Mayor" to whoever has "checked-in" the most frequently to a particular retail space over a 30-day period.

A luxury watchmaker may similarly instill a sense of pride among its customers by touting that very few examples of a particular model of watch were ever produced. A variant of perceived achievement tactics involves reminding or increasing consumers' perceptions of the obstacles that they had to overcome or sacrifices they had to make in order to attain a certain outcome. For example, a company selling products targeted at new mothers may reinforce the mothers' sense of pride by reminding them of the many physical and emotional challenges that they had to overcome during their pregnancy.

Besides influencing consumers' perception of achievement, marketers may increase consumers' feeling of pride by facilitating internal attributions of desirable outcomes. In general, such internal attributions can be encouraged by enhancing consumers' perception of involvement in the process that produced the desirable outcome. For example, in the prosocial domain, it is common for charities to motivate donations and promote internal attributions by publishing the names of charitable donors. Similarly, following successful campaigns, whether in the political arena or in fundraising, it is customary to send out messages such as "We could not have done it without you" to enhance perceptions of personal contribution. In the dining industry, an emerging trend for unique culinary experiences comes from high-end restaurants in which patrons are guided by professional chefs in the preparation of their own meals. Being involved in preparing one's own fancy meal presumably reinforces the patrons' sense of achievement and feelings of pride. Another way to promote consumers' internal attribution of desirable outcomes is to create some structural linkage between the consumers' actions and the desirable outcomes. A good example is TOMS Shoes' "One-for-One" campaign wherein the purchase of every pair of TOMS shoes is prominently linked to the donation of a second pair to a child in need.

The strategy of enhancing pride by encouraging internal attribution may also work when the consumers' contribution to the outcome is merely illusory. For example, the pride that sports game attendees collectively experience after watching their favorite team win is partly enhanced by an illusion of having somehow contributed to the team's victory by cheering and encouraging the team—an illusion that can be accentuated by spurring and leading the cheering (e.g., through rhythmic music, public announcers, and cheerleaders), as most sports teams usually do.

Walkathons (in which participants raise money by asking others to make donations to a cause by sponsoring their walk) leverage this principle by requiring participants to commit to a small physical sacrifice (e.g., walking two miles), thereby eliciting a sense of accomplishment that is often disproportionate to the actual magnitude of the personal sacrifice. Many successful public awareness campaigns on social media (e.g., the “ice-bucket” challenge) follow a similar principle.

Because pride is intimately linked to the projection of social status, various means of projecting one’s achievements or social status can help reinforce feelings of pride. These include (a) physical markers of personal achievement that are externally visible (e.g., medals, trophies, framed diplomas, thermal blankets for runners who finished a marathon), (b) symbolic indicators of membership in high-status groups (e.g., special airline-issued luggage tags for frequent flyers, prestige-oriented credit cards, VIP badges at concerts), (c) implicit association with high-status individuals and groups (e.g., jersey of a favorite team or player, photos with celebrities, autographs; see Cialdini et al. 1976), (d) conspicuous consumption and luxury products in general (e.g., Rolex watches, luxury bags, sports cars, designer suits); and (e) various tools for recording and broadcasting one’s achievements and social status (e.g., photographs, videos, wearable sports cameras, social media, etc.). For example, the diamond ring that future brides in the US typically receive as part of their engagement ritual is a quintessential conveyor of pride: a long-lasting symbolic marker of membership in a group to which they aspire, and a conspicuous luxury product that is eminently amenable to social broadcasting.

In addition, because pride is generally amplified by the presence of an audience, various means of building a visible audience to witness people’s achievements can help magnify their feelings of pride. For example, it is not uncommon in certain countries to inflate the crowd saluting the visit of a foreign leader by enlisting the mandatory attendance of school children. Similarly, many pride-inducing events (e.g., engagements, weddings, career promotions) are celebrated in shared retail or commercial spaces (e.g., large restaurants, cruise ships, bars and clubs) where other patrons and customers provide a captive audience. The world of social media has dramatically increased the possibility of enhancing people’s feelings of pride through access to greater audiences (e.g., “followers”). Most social media platforms thrive on this by reporting the number of friends or followers that people have, thus creating a motivation to further increase one’s number of friends and followers. New businesses have even emerged making it possible to

buy fake “followers.” The “stories” features that Instagram and Snapchat both provide allow posters to see how many times each post has been viewed and who has viewed it, thus reinforcing perceived audience effects.

Independent of the size of the audience, whether real or virtual, pride can also be enhanced through the provision of positive feedback, akin to the applause that typically follows a public performance. For example, some karaoke machines provide simulated applause after the performance of a song. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are especially potent amplifiers of pride because in addition to providing access to potentially large audiences, these particular platforms are structurally designed to favor positive feedback (in the form of “likes”) over negative feedback (“dislikes” are not allowed on these platforms). In this respect, other platforms such as YouTube that allow negative feedback (“dislikes”) may be less suitable vehicles for the amplification of pride. In department stores, it has long been common practice among sales associates to praise customers’ tastes and how well certain products (e.g., clothing, shoes, accessories) fit them.

Finally, it is important to note that the experience of pride has a physical embodiment associated with height and size. At a primal level, this embodiment transpires, for instance, in the erect stance that a victorious ape would display after defeating a rival. Linguistically, being worthy of pride is often marked by expressions such as “standing tall” or “looking up” to someone. Sport podiums are physically designed to have the gold medalist—who should be the proudest—stand on the highest platform, the silver medalist stand on the second highest platform, and the bronze medalist stand on the lower platform (though still higher than non-medalists). Symbols of collective pride including national monuments (e.g., the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument), the raising of a national flag, or national holiday fireworks typically have a similar element of height and size embedded in them.

The experience of pride may also be embodied in loudness. Not only would an ape that just vanquished its rival adopt an erect and expansive stance, it would also likely make a loud scream of victory. Similarly, in college football, collective pride in the home team is typically celebrated with the loud music of a large marching band. Yet another physical embodiment of pride is bright light, as reflected by the use of common linguistic metaphors such as “shining moment,” “brilliance,” and being a “star” to refer to achievements. In Olympic medal distribution

ceremonies, for instance, a spotlight is typically shown on the athletes being recognized. Therefore, in the engineering of pride, elements of height, size, loudness, and light should be considered (e.g., tall trophies, large medals, physical elevation, loud music, spotlights).

## Excitement

Excitement is a prevalent emotion in the marketplace. In fact, in an exploratory study of affective reactions to consumption situations by Derbaix and Pham (1991), excitement was the second most frequently reported emotion.<sup>3</sup> Excitement is typically construed as a single emotion characterized by high activation (or arousal) and positive valence (or pleasantness) (see Russell and Feldman Barrett 1999; Tsai et al. 2018; Watson and Tellegen 1985). However, a deeper phenomenological, content-driven analysis of the emotion suggests that three forms of excitement need to be distinguished, all of which have great relevance for consumer behavior and business: (a) anticipatory excitement; (b) immersive excitement; and (c) outcome excitement. Although the three forms of excitement share some common elements, such as the presence of a positive attentional goal object (i.e., a favorably evaluated target) and a high level of arousal, they have somewhat distinct antecedents and moderating factors (see Figures 2a–2c).

### Anticipatory Excitement

Anticipatory excitement is the form of excitement captured in statements such as “I am so excited that the next Avengers movie is coming out” or “I can’t wait to see you again.” In anticipatory excitement the person is experiencing intense eagerness and impatience at the prospect of an upcoming experience that is expected to be pleasurable and rewarding. Other terms capturing this form of excitement would be *eagerness* and *enthusiasm*. This is the form of excitement that Frijda (1986) singled out in his theory of emotion. As illustrated in Figure 2 (panel a), a primary driver of anticipatory excitement is close proximity to a highly desired goal object that is within reach. As an example, Frijda describes how excited his dog becomes upon realizing that they are about to go out for a walk. Frijda (1986, p. 36) conceptualizes this form of excitement as “blocked locomotion,” which he characterizes as a “relational activity blocked

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<sup>3</sup> In that study, the most frequently mentioned emotional response category was satisfaction/contentment/happiness. This category is not discussed here because it refers to a class of affective states that are more general than those that are the focus of the present article.

toward its object.” Such a conceptualization would account for the physical trepidation that generally accompanies this emotional state, as energy that otherwise would be directed at completing goal attainment is temporarily obstructed. Akin to Frijda’s dog impatiently jumping and wagging its tail while waiting for the door to open, consumers waiting for the doors of a popular store to open on a Black Friday would similarly tend to show some signs of physical agitation (e.g., shaking their arms, breathing heavily).

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Anticipatory excitement is especially intense if the person has been waiting for a long time to attain the goal object of interest, thus resulting in a build-up of tension waiting to be released, as illustrated by the following examples:

- *I felt really excited when I was waiting to watch the last season of Game of Thrones on HBO. I had seen all the rest of the seasons and had had to wait over two years for the last season. I was extremely excited to see what the new season brought and how the TV series wrapped up the story lines and ended. I counted down the years, months, weeks and days until the first episode started... (Female, 25)*
- *Recently, I had saved up some money to get a new TV, and I waited until there was a good sale going on. I went to the store, and found a really great deal, even better than I had hoped I would get while saving up. When I bought the TV, I was so excited that I was finally getting what I had been sacrificing for, and couldn't wait to get it home and see the picture.... What made me excited was that I had waited for a long time to get the TV, so I had to wait in line, pay, and drive the TV home before I got to use it. It was the final steps of getting what I was waiting for for so long, which just built up the anticipation. (Male, 36)*

It is important to note that experiences of anticipatory excitement necessarily require positive expectations about the object of potential excitement. That is, unless people expect what they are waiting for to be pleasurable or otherwise rewarding, they would not be positively excited. For instance, research on gambling behavior illustrates that it is the expectation of winning that excites gamblers, not just the thrill of gambling itself without the presence of a potential win (Wulfert et al. 2008). Notice in the examples below how these consumers’ excitement derives in part from them having plausible reasons to expect that the experience will be positive and rewarding:

- *My family took me out to a surprise dinner for pho on my birthday. I was very excited about this for many reasons. I got to spend time with my family, I knew that everyone had*

*prepared something special just for me and I had recently read about this restaurant and was anticipating going. (Female, 47)*

- *I get excited by all the hits Marvel and various other comics books and familiar properties coming to me in theaters. I'm so pumped to see my favorite characters and childhood heroes leap off the page and onto the screen before my very eyes. (Male, 34)*

Beyond positive expectations, anticipatory excitement is more likely when the experience being anticipated is special, novel, or unique:

- *I felt very excited when I went to the opera recently. The opera house is downtown and it is very pretty, so I was excited to go sit in it before the show. I also looked forward to dressing up for the event and sipping wine while people watching before the show started... I only get to participate in rarely because of the cost, so the novelty was a large factor. (Female 30)*
- *My youngest son has always liked BB8. When I found a BB8 remote controlled toy on Target on a special Black Friday deal, and had enough money to buy it for him, I was really excited! It was something I had looked to get for him the past two years, but couldn't afford the price when I found them. This time, I could. He always got excited about gifts, ..., and would laugh and bounce around when excited. I could hardly wait for Christmas so I could give it to him! (Female 48)*
- *I felt really excited when I was booking my flight and hotel for my upcoming trip to NYC for my birthday. It was kind of a spur of the moment decision, so I think that made it more exciting. It was also to celebrate my birthday which is a special occasion I am looking forward to, so this made it even more fun and I am really anticipating the trip soon. (Female, 25)*

Anticipatory excitement is also magnified when the experience of eagerly awaiting an event is shared and communal, as illustrated by the following accounts:

- *I love the minute before the movie starts, the dim lights, the feeling of anticipation and other tingles going on in my very spine when it gets really really dark and the lights go dim, and me and all of the others that I mentioned earlier who are sitting with me feel that same sense of not knowing what's about to go down. (Male, 34)*
- *I was planning a Disney cruise with my family. I planned this cruise for so long. I was so excited, it is all I could think about for a while. My whole family was excited, we talked about it nonstop. We planned all of the little details of the trip for a whole year, before we actually went. (Female, 31)*
- *I was REALLY excited for the launch of FFXIV [a popular video game] and I went to the store early to get my copy of it before they opened. It was really cool to stand there with other people talking about what we planned on playing and what server we were going to*

*be on. Then when we finally got into the store it was even better.... They had all these posters up everywhere and everyone was talking about what was going on. (Female, 24)*

The amplification of anticipatory excitement that arises from a shared experience is especially pronounced if the event or outcome encourages people to feel that they are part of something “bigger than themselves.” For example, there was tremendous excitement in November 2008 when Barack Obama was elected as the first African American President of the United States. Eight years later, on Election Day, November 8, 2016, there was a similarly intense excitement among many Democratic-leaning American voters, as nearly everyone expected Hillary Clinton to become the first elected female American president later that day—a major symbolic outcome that failed to materialize. Below is a “larger-than-oneself” experience shared by a survey respondent:

- *I was in Redmond, Washington for the launch of Windows 95. It was a huge affair, with celebrities and Bill Gates doing a lot of introductions. The place was simply electric. The team had spent years on getting Windows 95 ready and it was about to take over the market as the most dominant desktop operating system. I had been working in Information Technology for some years and I was very excited to have this new OS to give to my clients.... It was almost like a holiday at Microsoft. There were members of the Rolling Stones playing "Start me up" and the place was just crazy with excitement...the energy of the developers around me finally shipping a product that so many had worked hard to become a reality. (Male, 58)*

### Immersive Excitement

Immersive excitement arises from experiences for which consumption is ongoing rather than being anticipated. This is the form of excitement that consumers may experience when playing video games, riding roller coasters, or watching live sports events. Immersive excitement typically arises from high-arousal experiences in which people are considerably absorbed and that they greatly enjoy. Such experiences would typically be described as “exciting,” “so much fun,” “thrilling,” or “fascinating” by consumers. Two key terms that would capture the notion of immersive excitement are *thrill* and *exhilaration*. Note that anticipatory and immersive excitement are not mutually exclusive, as upcoming experiences that people greatly look forward to (e.g., the Super Bowl) may eventually prove particularly thrilling when they unfold.

As illustrated in Figure 2 (panel b), an important driver of immersive excitement is the energy, arousal, and stimulation associated with the activity being consumed. All else being equal, it is generally more exciting to attend a rock music concert than to attend a classical music

performance, and more exciting to go on a fast-paced thrill ride in an amusement park than to steer a pedal-boat on a lake. In the retailing domain, the sheer variety of stores in a mall has been shown to increase consumers' excitement in visiting the mall and the desire to stay (Wakefield and Baker 1998). Unsurprisingly, accounts of immersive excitement shared by the survey respondents often involved sports events, amusement parks, and other high-stimulation venues, as illustrated below:

- *A personal experience in which I felt a great sense of excitement was when I went on a vacation with not only my family but a few of my coworkers and my partner at the same time! It was at Kings Island [an amusement park] in Ohio! We all rode the rides there together for most of the day, it was a very warm and sunny day and once we were done with our adventures of riding the rides and seeing the wonderful and exciting sites there were to see together, we all sat down and ate at a restaurant together! (Female, 34)*
- *I went to Speedsportz [a go-karting company] when they opened one in our town. I went with my daughter and we stayed for over two hours. I have never had so much fun.... We got so sunburned even though we had sunblock on but it was so much fun! She said it was the best birthday she had ever had, so that was pretty cool for me to hear.... [What made it exiting is] the anticipation of going and of course the physical thrill of racing and maneuvering and trying to beat my daughter. (Female, 51)*
- *I recall the first time I went to the Ala Moana shopping center here in Hawaii, which is one of the largest shopping complexes in the country. I was mesmerized by the amount of things there were on display, and the hustle and bustle of the area. I had never before in my life seen a mall that was so extravagant or luxurious. I felt quite captivated by all the sights, and went into as many stores as I could to see whatever would strike my fancy. (Male, 24)*

Over and above the high-energy nature of the experience itself, a key driver of the thrill and immersive excitement that people derive from consumption experiences is the novelty and specialness of the experience for the consumer. Below are two illustrative accounts, the latter being rather poignant:

- *I was really excited when I went to a local arcade called the Extreme Fun Center with my boyfriend, neighbor, and his son. We spent a long time going around all the different arcade games and trying them out. Then we tried out the laser tag, and that was definitely the highlight of the day, we even got a second free game. It was really exciting since it was the first time I had been there, and everything was a new experience. (Male, 28)*
- *When I was 10 years old I went to an amusement park for the first time. My family was poor so this was the first time I had ever done anything outside of the little town I grew*

*up in. My best friend and her family were going to 6 Flags in Missouri and invited me to go. My parents couldn't really afford it but somehow scraped together the money to buy my ticket to the park. I was more than excited at the park. I had never seen a roller coaster, let alone rode one and I had never ridden a ride of any sort other than a horse or car. We spent the whole day and I was at 10 the entire time. I was gaga, excited, my stomach swirled from riding the rides and I thought i was going to pass out a couple of times I get so worked up. I remember that day crystal clear because it was huge for me to get out of my little town. (Female, 34)*

Another significant driver of immersive excitement is a degree of uncertainty as to what will exactly happen during the experience. Vosgerau, Wertenbroch, and Carmon (2006) call this notion *indeterminacy*, which they define as the degree to which a consumption experience is not decided ex ante. According to Vosgerau et al. (2006), indeterminacy is a key reason why consumers generally prefer to watch live television, which they find more exciting, compared to taped recordings of the same programs. This is also the reason why consumers are particularly averse to movie “spoilers” and to accidentally learning the result of a sports game that they intend to watch with a delay. Results from fMRI studies provide a possible biological explanation for such phenomena: mixtures of pleasurable stimuli are neurologically more rewarding when their sequence is unpredictable (Berns et al. 2001). More generally, uncertainty tends to amplify people’s affective responses to emotional events (Bar-Anan, Wilson, and Gilbert 2009). In the following accounts, it is apparent that the consumers’ excitement is tied to them not knowing in advance what would happen (i.e., indeterminacy) and their wanting to witness the resolution with their own eyes:

- [About the movie Avengers: Endgame] *I'll avoid spoilers, but during the third act of the film my favorite character got to do something I'd been hoping for a long time and I lost my mind (so did the rest of my theater!)* (Female, 25)
- [About a World Series game] *It was so riveting that you didn't want to leave your seat, and your eyes were glued to the field at all times because you just didn't want to miss something important happening.* (Male, 33)
- [About the TV show Games of Thrones: What was exciting] *It was anticipation to see what happened to the characters in the season and to see how the story arc for the program played out. I had a lot of emotions invested in the series that I had watched for so long, over many years.* (Female, 25)

Another driver of immersive excitement is a sense of communion and synchronicity with others who are sharing the same experience. This sense of communal experience may also

contribute to a feeling of being part of something greater than oneself, as mentioned previously in relation to anticipatory excitement:

- *There were many things about my experience [a day in an amusement park] that made me feel excited! The combination of so many friends, family, and coworkers getting together to do the activities and also, actually doing the activities with them all and then finally sitting down at the end of a gorgeous and perfect summer day to eat a good meal together and relax. (Female, 34)*
- *I went to a World Series game with my sister. It was the Angels versus the Giants.... I remember every time one of the Angel players would get a base hit everyone in our section would high five each other.... The factors that were responsible for my excitement were definitely the company I was in, the atmosphere of the place and getting to be a part of something that was much greater than me. (Male, 33)*
- *I was incredibly excited to go see Avengers: Endgame. I'd been going to see those movies for ten years and they were a huge part of my entertainment life, and it definitely blew me out of the water...there were a couple moments when the entire theater was just cheering and clapping and screaming. It was amazing.... not only was I super excited, so was everyone else in the theater...it felt almost like being a part of something bigger. (Female, 25)*

Both immersive and anticipatory excitement seem to belong to a broader class of emotional experiences related to the notion of interest and engagement (Izard 1977), whose evolutionary function may have been to foster exploratory behavior (Plutchik 1980). It is also interesting to note that while both forms of excitement are typically pleasant, sometimes the activation and tension associated with these emotional experiences may be so high that they become aversive (e.g., consumers who are so tense while watching a sports game that they “can’t take it anymore”).

### Outcome Excitement

Consumers’ reported experiences of excitement reveal a third form of excitement, one that is not typically considered in major theories of emotion (e.g., Frijda 1986; Izard 1977; Plutchik 1980; Russell 1980). This form of excitement is not primarily linked to anticipated experiences or to ongoing, immersive experiences, but rather to particular outcomes that consumers find greatly satisfying. Below are two representative examples:

- *When I was younger I wanted a certain collectible more than anything but it was too expensive and I didn't have that kind of money being so young. My parents decided to buy it for me, and while I felt a mix of guilt and happiness I felt mostly joy and excitement at*

*receiving such a special product for myself.... I was excited because it was something I really wanted, I was also excited because I had the perfect spot for it. I was excited also because it was a rare and special item my parents had bought for me. (Male, 19)*

- *I was really excited...when I entered a radio contest and won two free tickets to a Lord of the Rings marathon that was being held at my local movie theater. My sister and I love those movies and we weren't able to see them in theaters when they were released because we were so young. This was a really exciting day for our family...The main factor that made us excited was that we won the tickets. We never had won anything like that before... (Male, 24)*

Notice that in these two consumer experiences, the source of excitement lies in an outcome that has already materialized (receiving the coveted collectible and winning the movie tickets), rather than in an ongoing event or an anticipated event. In other words, in these experiences, the excitement is not driven by some indeterminacy but rather by the *determinacy* of a reality that the consumer finds particularly pleasant.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, we refer to this form of excitement as *outcome excitement*—a momentary experience of intense happiness and satisfaction derived from the materialization of a particular outcome. Other terms conceptually related to this form of excitement include *delight* and *elation*.

As illustrated in Figure 2 (panel c), a major component of many experiences of outcome excitement is the presence of a significant preexisting goal or intense desire that has not yet been fulfilled. In the first of the two accounts reported above, the respondent explicitly mentions how the collectible is something that he had been wanting for a long time. Below are two more examples showing the critical role of unfulfilled long-held wants and desires in preparing the terrain for outcome excitement:

- *I'm an amateur astronomer. I've never bought a high-end telescope, and often even used homemade ones. There was one I'd looked every so often for several years. I'd get the urge to buy a specific very expensive instrument, then come to my senses and look at good but less expensive telescopes, and this one was always one I thought I'd like. But it cost more than I was willing to pay. Then I happened to get acquainted online with a fellow in an astronomy e-group. He had one of those telescopes. I let him know that I always wanted one. A few months later, he emailed me that he was buying a bigger*

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<sup>4</sup> An anonymous reviewer raised the question of whether outcome excitement can be separated from anticipatory excitement. One might argue that people get excited by certain outcomes only because these outcomes foreshadow future exciting experiences (e.g., being excited about receiving an engagement proposal). We believe that the two forms of excitement are genuinely distinct. Although outcome excitement is sometimes accompanied by positive expectations about future experiences (e.g., being excited about winning a lottery and being impatient to spend money at will), outcome excitement need not be defined by those positive anticipations. For example, if a consumer receives a surprise discount because it is her birthday, she would likely experience some excitement not because she is anticipating some future utility but because the discount is a pleasantly unexpected outcome.

*telescope, and was going to eBay the one he had, but if I was interested he would sell it to me rather than eBay it. He offered it for a little over half the new price. I jumped at the chance. It seemed like fate finally favored me. (Male, 73)*

- *I felt excited when I recently purchased a computer. I was excited because it was something that I had really wanted for a long time. I put off buying it for a while due to the cost and wanting to research the best brands and parts that I would need to get what I really wanted. I finally bought all the components and assembled the computer. It was exciting to use it because it was nice and new and much faster than my old computer. (Male, 32)*

The feeling of excitement is especially strong if the person has previously struggled to attain the goal or fulfill the desire. For example, when the Philadelphia Eagles won the Super Bowl in February 2018, excitement in the city of Philadelphia was particularly high because the Eagles had not won an NFL Championship in 57 years. As illustrated by the two accounts below, repeated failures to attain a goal or fulfill a desire accentuate people's excitement when the goal is eventually attained or the desire is finally met:

- *Once, when my son was one-year old, I was online shopping for a very-hard-to-find toy that was extremely popular at the time. I stalked like six different websites for weeks, and the toy was never in stock. My five-year-old niece had informed me that I "absolutely must" buy this toy for my son for Christmas. Well, I found the toy! One of my friends texted that the toy had come into stock on target.com. I literally danced around the living room. That is by far my most exciting shopping experience, even though my son was so young he did not care for the toy. (Female, 32)*
- *The last exciting event I can remember concerning my consumption of a consumer product was when I got to try the Beyond Burger. I went vegan about five years ago, so I had not had a hamburger in over three years. About two years ago I heard about the Beyond Burger. I had eaten lots of "veggie burgers" in that time, but most either were not trying to replicate animal products or if they did, they did a pretty poor job of it. But the Beyond Burger was different, it was the closest thing to a beef burger to date. I had heard of them for almost a year before they finally arrived in my area. One day I stumbled on them at an Albertsons near my house. I quickly bought them and took them home and prepared them. It was amazing! It tasted just like a burger to me (keep in mind I had not had a burger in years, so It may only taste like what I remember a burger to taste like!). It was a wonderful feeling knowing the desire to have a hamburger could never make me go back to eating meat because I had a very convincing alternative now. (Male, 50)*

Another important determinant of outcome excitement is when the outcome feels particularly special. (Recall that specialness also accentuates anticipatory excitement.) An outcome may feel particularly special and trigger excitement for various reasons, including because it was unexpected (receiving a surprise gift), because it is a first-time experience for the consumer (e.g.,

being asked to be the maid of honor in a wedding), because it is a rare occurrence (e.g., hitting a hole-in-one when playing golf), or because it is a new milestone for the consumer (e.g., reaching the highest frequent-flyer status on an airline). The following accounts illustrate excitement arising from outcomes that were unexpected and/or a first-time experience for the consumer:

- *Money is tight in our household, we don't have much to spare on fresh foods and groceries. We are usually limited to about \$100 every 2 weeks for all food and household items. Last fall as our farmer's market was coming to a close for the winter, I was talking to one of the farmers.... As I was there at the end of the day on the last day of the year, there was a lot of produce left. He asked me to give him \$5 and asked if there was room in my car, I answered in the affirmative and he started grabbing boxes and bags of produce and walking them to my car trunk. I was THRILLED and grateful, likely the closest I've come to real excitement as an adult. (Female, 40)*
- *The first year I got back money for taxes and had some money saved up I was really excited to buy a ps4 when they first came out and a new tv.... it was a first for me. I never thought I'd be able to do something like that growing up. (Male, 25)*
- *The experience that comes to mind is when my husband and I went on a vacation with my brother and sister-in-law. We went to the beach and it was our first vacation together. I was excited because it was my first vacation, period, in a long time. We ended up having a great time together. (Female, 33)*

In addition, an outcome may feel particularly special when the consumer perceives that there is an especially strong match between the outcome and the consumer's needs, desires, and circumstances. Survey respondents describing their experiences of excitement often reported that there was "a perfect fit" between what happened and what they were looking for. In the preceding account of the amateur astronomer who had been wanting a particular telescope, he describes the circumstances that led him to finally obtaining the desired telescope as "*It seemed like fate finally favored me*" (Male, 73). In the example of the consumer who received a lot of produce from a farmer for only \$5, the outcome was special not just because it was unexpected, but also because there was a perfect fit between the farmer's offer and the consumer's very modest economic condition. Below are two examples of consumers being excited because of the fit between products they found and their needs:

- *I recently bought a new car. My previous car was starting to become dated and lacked a lot of modern technologies. So I knew I wanted a late year model car so that there would be more modern conveniences. When I found the car I wanted to buy, I became so excited because it had almost everything I wanted, and it was at a really good price point. (Male, 29)*

- *I was shopping at a restaurant service store and I found a big bag of popcorn with 24 small, individually wrapped bags of popcorn. I was very excited because I hadn't seen such a wonderful way of packaging popcorn before and I wanted to buy it so I could eat small bags of popcorn...the fact that it was popcorn in packaging that fit my lifestyle perfectly were all what made me excited. It just turned out perfectly in the moment and that's what made me so excited. (Female, 19)*
- *I recently needed to decorate the walls of a new home and I really wanted to find some oil paintings. I went to an estate sale in a very nice neighborhood.... I not only found beautiful oil paintings but I also found a very large wall mirror. As I looked around I discovered a beautiful grandmother clock as well. I was able to purchase all my finds at a very reasonable price. It was a great day. (Female, 58)*

Another driver of outcome excitement is an expectation that the satisfying outcome can be repeated. In the example of the man who was happy that he had finally found a satisfying brand of vegetarian hamburgers, the consumer ended his account by mentioning that “*It was a wonderful feeling knowing the desire to have a hamburger could never make me go back to eating meat because I had a very convincing alternative now*” (Male, 50). Therefore, although outcome excitement and anticipatory excitement are conceptually distinct, positive anticipations can sometimes reinforce excitement over certain outcomes. Below are additional examples of consumers who are excited not just about a particular marketplace experience but also about the prospect of being able to replicate this experience in the future:

- *I was extremely excited recently because I discovered how awesome getting massages were for my MS pain. My doctors had been recommending them for pain and stress for years and I always thought that they were way too expensive for me to be able to afford until I found Massage Envy. I adore going to get massages now...for \$50 a month you can get an hour-long massage and anything on top of that is half off of your bill.... It is amazing and you are well worth the investment. I was extremely excited when I was signing up to become a member because I knew that I had something to look forward to that was going to help me. (Female, 36)*
- [About trying a new restaurant with the family for a birthday] *It was very nice, not too expensive and the food was wonderful. I was also excited because this is a place where we can all spend time together in the future. (Female, 47)*

The confidence in one’s ability to repeat an experience as a contributor to outcome excitement points to a more general theoretical principle: For excitement to arise in response to a particular outcome, there should be confidence in the validity of this outcome. Indeed, it is

difficult to be excited about an outcome that one is not fully certain of. For example, when political election results are too close to call, supporters of the party that is in the lead but has not officially won would not experience genuine excitement until the outcome of the election is formalized.

### Propositions on the Engineering of Excitement

The preceding observations about the psychology of different forms of excitement summarized in Figure 2 offer intriguing insights as to how firms can engineer or amplify feelings of excitement in the marketplace, including in retail settings. We discuss these insights separately for each form of excitement.

*Engineering of Anticipatory Excitement.* As noted above, a major component of the experience of anticipatory excitement is a close proximity to a desired goal. Therefore, a major strategy for inciting feelings of anticipatory excitement is to increase the perceived proximity of the goal object. Practically, this strategy can be implemented by making consumers' expectations of the goal objects more concrete. Examples include showing movie trailers in advance of a film release, using rich consumption imagery in television commercials (e.g., images of a sizzling steak on a grill), attractive product displays in department stores and brand showrooms (e.g., Samsung's concept stores), and vivid and flattering images of the product on packages (e.g., Apple's packages). A classic example of business engineering of anticipatory excitement is the annual auto shows held in major cities around the world (e.g., New York, Tokyo, Frankfurt), in which automobile enthusiasts get to view up-close, and "touch and feel" the latest car models, and glimpse into various manufacturers' visions of the future. New technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can also be used to bolster the concreteness of various goal objects (e.g., trying on wedding dresses using AR technology). This principle of making proximate goal objects more concrete helps explain the popularity of product "unboxing" videos on YouTube. Unboxing videos draw their appeal from their ability to help viewers vividly visualize the experience of acquiring the featured product, thereby titillating consumers' excitement.

Another major aspect of anticipatory excitement is a buildup of tension waiting to be released. Anticipatory excitement can therefore be amplified through various means of building psychological tension. Prototypical examples include the use of countdowns, such as in the

iconic New York City Times Square “ball drop” on New Year’s Eve, and the familiar crescendo of drumrolls before celebratory announcements or to signal key moments during circus acts. Another means of creating tension is to erect temporary obstacles between the person and the goal object (e.g., keeping the doors of a Walmart store closed before opening at midnight on Black Friday; wrapping gifts that recipients will have to physically unwrap; hiding eggs for children to find on Easter). Tension—and the resulting anticipatory excitement—can also arise from a feeling of competition with others striving for the same goal object. Classic examples are the anticipatory excitement experienced by runners about to start a marathon, and the emotional excitement that often accompanies the bidding process at auctions.

Anticipatory excitement is, of course, predicated on the desirability of the goal object. As observed earlier, anticipatory excitement is greater when the experience being anticipated feels “special” in some way. This feeling of “specialness” may arise from the experience being unique or rare (e.g., attending a FIFA World Cup), novel (e.g., visiting a new country), or having symbolic value (e.g., planning a vacation in celebration of a 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary). Breakthrough innovations (e.g., Uber when it was launched, Warby Parker’s home-trial business model for eyewear, Airbnb, self-driving cars) and new versions of popular products (e.g., Apple’s iPhone X, Tesla’s Model 3) are common sources of anticipatory excitement. The streetwear brand Supreme regularly leverages this principle with their strategy of limited product releases that are only available in small quantities, at select locations, for a restricted period of time.

In addition to genuine innovation, mere *perceptions* of novelty and specialness can elicit anticipatory excitement. This can be done, for instance, by reframing the temporal and/or geographical boundaries against which the target experience will be positioned (e.g., “first sale of the season”; “first live concert in three years”; “first visit outside the US”). A good example of the effects of perceived novelty on anticipatory excitement is the yearly enthusiasm generated every November by the arrival of the latest “Beaujolais Nouveau” wine. A subjective sense of specialness, hence anticipatory excitement, can also be evoked through perceptions of scarcity. Disney has been known, for example, to intentionally restrict the availability of some of its classic animated movie titles (e.g., *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) as a means to build market anticipation for re-release of these movies. Perceived specialness can also be achieved by reinterpreting an otherwise common experience as being special. For example, the relatively

recent notion of “staycation” illustrates the idea that a simple stay at home can be reframed as a mini-vacation. Many everyday consumption activities can be made “special” by construing them as “rituals” (e.g., weekly date nights, bringing coffee to one’s spouse every morning), which, as found by Garcia-Rada, Sezer, and Norton (2019), can contribute to people’s happiness.

For anticipatory excitement to materialize, not only should the goal object be desirable, the consumer should generally have positive expectations about the eventual outcome of the experience, as previously discussed. For example, it is difficult for a consumer to be excited about going to a comedy show if he or she does not expect the performer to be funny. In building anticipatory excitement, it is therefore helpful to provide consumers some form of assurance about the likely quality of their experience. Common tactics include (a) validation by peers (e.g., customer ratings, #1 movie at the box office), experts (e.g., movie critics, Michelin Star ratings), or celebrities; (b) brand reputation; and (c) satisfaction guarantees. Note that while some form of assurance is generally helpful in facilitating anticipatory excitement, such assurances should not be provided in a way that results in a complete removal of uncertainty regarding the experience. Indeed, part of what facilitates anticipatory excitement is a subjective sense of unpredictability about the details of the experience.

Although not explicitly mentioned by respondents in our exploratory surveys, an implicit critical component in the experience of anticipatory excitement—and indeed of all three forms of excitement—is a focus of attention on the goal object. This attentional focus is a necessary element of the action readiness associated with anticipatory excitement (Frijda 1986). Therefore, anticipatory excitement can be enhanced by helping consumers focus their attention on the target object. The typical setup of the stage in performance halls or theaters is a classic illustration: The stage is centrally located; it is generally elevated; and lighting is directed at the stage, while the rest of the venue remains unlit. Focused attention can also be enhanced through booming pre-performance announcements (e.g., “And now, our main event of the night...”) or loud introductory music (e.g., the opening theme songs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox or Star Wars movies). Interestingly, another way in which attentional focus can be elevated is through complete momentary silence (e.g., the typical pause before announcing Academy Award winners). Countdown to the focal event, mentioned earlier as a means of building tension, also serves to sharpen attentional focus.

*Engineering of Immersive Excitement.* Because immersive excitement also requires attentional focus, various means of focusing consumers' attention already mentioned in relation to anticipatory excitement (e.g., spotlight on center stage) can be applied to enhance immersive excitement as well. In addition, it is important to reduce any sources of distraction. For example, movie theaters typically request that viewers turn off their phones and refrain from talking during the movie. Another technique for focusing consumers' attention in the context of television and cinema is the use of slow-motion for key moments (e.g., replay of a soccer goal, dramatic action scenes in a movie). VR and AR technologies are obvious means of enhancing immersive excitement through their ability to focus consumers' attention and their general sensory richness. So-called "4D" rides that are common in amusement parks typically combine the above elements (e.g., attention directed at a screen, slow-motion of 3D effects, VR and AR effects).

As noted above, a major pillar of immersive excitement, alongside the novelty or specialness of the experience, is the general presence of energy. Therefore, a natural way to enhance immersive excitement is to leverage various forms of embodied energy, including (a) bright lights, (b) loud sounds, (c) speed, (d) kinetic energy, (e) electricity, and (f) heat. Practical examples of settings that leverage some of these elements to promote excitement include rock-music concerts, rave dance parties, laser shows, fireworks, car races, roller coasters, boxing events, game arcades, and casinos. Energy and excitement can also be conveyed through more symbolic means such as the use of all capital letters and exclamation points (e.g., YAHOO!), and the use of high-saturation colors (Labreque and Milne 2012).

Immersive excitement is also greater when there is indeterminacy underlying the experience (e.g., watching a sports game live vs. after knowing the results). Therefore, building or retaining some degree of unpredictability in the experience that consumers will receive—without, of course, lowering the average quality of the experience—is generally desirable. Live sports events are the classic example of this principle at work (Nelson, Galak, and Vosgerau 2008). The programming of probabilistic reward schedules in slot machines and in common video games also follows this principle (Shen, Fishbach and Hsee 2015). Similarly, live music concerts are excitingly immersive because of the inherent unpredictability that live performances bring, even for familiar songs. Note that two types of uncertainty can be distinguished in the consumption of entertainment products (Yuksel, Miller, and Iyer 2017): *Outcome* uncertainty arises from a lack of knowledge of *what* the outcome of the event will be (e.g., who wins a given sports contest,

how a movie ends), whereas *process* uncertainty arises from a lack of knowledge of *how* a given outcome comes to be (e.g., how a movie unfolds). Live theater performances typically combine both types of uncertainties. These two forms of uncertainty are also well illustrated in the popular television show *Survivor*, now in its 40<sup>th</sup> season, in which the identity of the winner is revealed only at the end of the show, thus creating outcome uncertainty, and new participants, challenges, and locales are integrated every season, thereby creating process uncertainty. Producers of the show occasionally introduce changes into the game as the season progresses, including changes in game rules, further amplifying both types of uncertainty. Escape rooms, which have recently become a popular form of entertainment, also rely on outcome and process uncertainty as a prime driver of immersiveness.

Because immersive excitement tends to be stronger when experiences are shared, as previously observed, it can be amplified by strengthening communal aspects of the experience. The most obvious way to do so is to facilitate group experiences, as opposed to catering to individual consumers. In amusement parks, thrill rides are typically operated with trains of two or more cars; Go Kart sessions are normally dispatched in waves of drivers; and laser-tag sessions are generally organized by groups. In addition to administering the experience in groups (as opposed to individually), a sense of community can be fostered by a variety of means. For example, in live music concerts, performers often encourage fans to sing along or jointly wave light sticks (or lighters in the past). Applause, cheers, and chants at sports events serve to generate a sense of togetherness. Such communal feelings are reinforced by the close physical proximity to others in crowded venues. Common paraphernalia (e.g., shared team jerseys or band t-shirts) also contribute to a sense of community and shared experience, as does an element of synchronicity. This synchronicity is a function of whether the person experiences the focal event in real time (e.g., watching a live game) and whether the person's experiences coincide with the timing of others' experiences. Research shows that synchronicity of experiences across consumers tends to increase their sense of togetherness (Ramanathan, Vohs, and McGill 2013) as well as their overall enjoyment of the experience (Ramanathan and McGill 2007). Therefore, immersive excitement can be enhanced by enabling the perceived synchronization of experiences across consumers. The live streaming of events is a prototypical example of synchronicity at work. The immersive power of synchronicity also explains the rising popularity of online games such as Fortnite that allow players and their friends to experience and navigate a shared virtual

reality in real time. It also explains the remarkable success of Peloton, a seller of personal indoor exercise bikes, whose main differentiating proposition is that through an attached monitor, users get to remotely join live spinning classes conducted in real time. Even physical products can be designed to facilitate experiences of synchronicity. For example, in order to promote more engaging beer-consumption experiences, Heineken recently developed interactive bottles that light up when put in contact with other Heineken bottles during toasts (CNBC Africa 2014).

Another important determinant of immersive excitement is the mindset that consumers adopt during the experience. Consumers are more likely to fully immerse themselves in an experience and feel excited if they embrace a *consummatory mindset*, which we define as an openness to fully enjoy and savor the experience. A critical or skeptical mindset tends to inhibit the ability to be immersively excited (e.g., a rebellious teenager refusing to enjoy a family vacation). The adoption of a consummatory mindset can be facilitated by a variety of means. For example, event spectators are more likely to be prepared to enjoy an event if they wear event-appropriate apparel and accessories (e.g., wearing baseball caps at baseball games; dressing up for a Carnegie Hall concert). Event-appropriate apparel and accessories can similarly facilitate a consummatory mindset for experiences in which the consumer is an active participant rather than a mere spectator (e.g., wearing a costume for a Halloween party; wearing green-colored clothes on St. Patrick's Day). Pre-activity rituals, such as stretching before a race, having a tailgate party before a football game, or having a few shots of hard liquor before a night out, similarly help consumers ready themselves for the impending enjoyment of the focal experience. Another way to facilitate the adoption of a suitable consummatory mindset is to provide an introductory orientation session before the actual experience (e.g., instruction briefings before laser tag or paint-ball sessions). Opening acts in performances (e.g., rock concerts or standup comedy), which are generally meant to "warm up" the audience, can also be thought of as facilitating a consummatory mindset. In restaurants, the ordering of drinks "to start" and the provision of bread "for the table" soon after serve the same function: they promote a more immersive dining experience by putting patrons "in the mood" to fully enjoy their meal.

*Engineering of Outcome Excitement.* Given that a major factor in outcome excitement is the preexistence of an unfulfilled goal or desire, it becomes apparent that the inherent energy that accumulates from the previous obstruction of a goal or desire will ignite outcome excitement when the goal or desire is finally fulfilled. This outcome excitement can be

controlled in part by influencing the goal itself and how it will be fulfilled or achieved. Many successful marketers derive their success from their ability to elevate the desirability of what they have to offer (e.g., Apple's iPhone X, adidas's Yeezy shoes, DeBeers's diamonds), thereby influencing consumers' goals. Hence in theory, one means of creating outcome excitement is by dictating *which* outcome consumers are motivated to pursue. For example, some high-end restaurants have successfully promoted the virtues and appeal of "molecular gastronomy," a previously foreign concept. Similarly, Beats by Dre headphones have successfully been positioned as must-have premium headphones, despite their unexceptional quality (Consumer Reports 2013).

Setting up challenging but surmountable obstacles between the person and the goal object can intensify the excitement that the consumer subsequently experiences when the goal is attained. Some loyalty programs leverage this principle by requiring a certain number of purchases for a reward (e.g., buy 10 salads, get the next one free) and by making progress toward the reward transparent (e.g., physical punch cards), thereby enhancing consumers' excitement with the reward when it is attained. Similarly, when consumers must wait in line for the opportunity to buy the latest generation of a gaming console (e.g., Xbox One X) it helps create excitement with the purchased product.

A general driver of outcome excitement is often the unexpectedness of the particular outcome (e.g., winning the first prize in a raffle). Therefore, a primary means of eliciting outcome excitement revolves around orchestrating the surprise element of the outcome. As a general principle, surprise will be greater when the consumer has no expectation of the outcome in question. Hence, marketers seeking to create outcome excitement should consider suppressing consumer expectations regarding the particular outcome. For example, Apple is notorious for its attempts to keep consumers "in the dark" about its major upcoming innovations. Aside from an absence of expectation, surprise requires a focus of attention and a concentrated (rather than gradual) unfolding of the outcome. Again, Apple's annual September event in which the company typically unveils its latest innovations is a perfect example of how to focus and concentrate consumers' attention for maximum surprise effect and therefore maximum potential for excitement. The recent announcement made by the billionaire philanthropist Robert Smith at the 2019 Morehouse College graduation ceremony—that he would pay for all graduating seniors' student loans—is a quintessential illustration of the

amplifying effect of surprise on outcome excitement. In popular reality TV shows revolving around complete makeovers of properties and businesses (e.g., “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition”; “Restaurant Impossible”), the drastically transformed property or business is revealed at the end of each episode in a dramatic fashion to the surprise and delight of the owners.

In addition to the use of conventional surprise tactics, the power of unexpectedness in inducing outcome excitement can be leveraged through other forms of expectation violation, such as an incongruity between the setting in which the outcome takes place and the outcome itself. For instance, a marriage proposal offered underwater during a diving excursion has a greater potential to violate expectations and thus elicit excitement than a more mundane proposal made on a beach. Another form of expectation violation may lie in the currency in which the outcome is realized: Recall the experience of the woman who was so excited to receive a batch of free produce at her local farmer’s market in one of the vignettes. Along these same lines, instead of offering small discount coupons as a reward to loyal customers, The Heights, the first author’s favorite neighborhood restaurant in New York, occasionally gives complimentary margaritas. While the two types of rewards have comparable monetary values, the excitement elicited by these rewards tends to be greater for the complimentary margaritas than for the discount coupons. Holding the overall setting and nature of the outcome constant, unexpectedness and outcome excitement can also arise from incongruity in how the outcome is delivered. For example, receiving a free sample candy from a humanoid robot would presumably be more exciting than the same candy from a regular store employee.

A common thread of the various experiences of outcome excitement shared by our respondents is that something or someone *other* than themselves caused the particular outcome that they were excited about. For example, in the case of the person excited about receiving a long-desired collectible, it was his parents who helped him fulfill his desire; in the case of the amateur astronomer who wanted a particular telescope, it was an acquaintance met online who sold it to him at a very good price; and in the case of the person who received free tickets to a *Lord of the Rings* marathon, he won these tickets through a radio contest. Therefore, a subtle but noteworthy determinant of outcome excitement is the attribution of the outcome to an external source. By contrast, desirable outcomes that are attributed to oneself are more likely to elicit feelings of pride rather than excitement. Consequently, outcome excitement can be

fostered by encouraging external attributions of the outcome. For example, offering a business-class upgrade to a traveler is more likely to elicit excitement if it is presented as a gift from the airline than if it is perceived by the traveler as an entitlement. In the case of outcomes completely driven by chance (e.g., lottery, roulette), one way to encourage external attribution in order to enhance excitement is to make the randomness of the outcome-generation process very concrete and salient (e.g., the spinning of numbered balls in lottery machines; the spinning of a roulette wheel in one direction and rolling of the ball in the other direction).<sup>5</sup>

For outcomes not strictly driven by chance (e.g., spotting a celebrity at a restaurant, finding a great deal at a discount retailer), excitement can be amplified by emphasizing the serendipity of the outcome (e.g., X was in town just for two days to promote her latest movie; this is a one-day-only sale for this brand). A variant of the perceived serendipity effect that was repeatedly expressed in reported accounts of outcome excitement is the perception of a “perfect fit” between what the consumer wanted and the materialized outcome, which respondents sometimes even described as “fate.” Outcome excitement can therefore be intensified by increasing the perceived fit between the outcome and the consumer’s needs and wants. Strategies and technologies that revolve around the fine-grained customization of products (e.g., customized vacation packages, custom-designed sneakers, customized news feeds, micro-targeted ads), facilitation of consumer choice (e.g., Warby Parker’s at-home trials of eyewear; virtual dressing-room apps; ability to filter and sort items on Amazon), or personalized assistance (e.g., private shoppers, one-on-one consultations, virtual assistants such as Alexa) all tend to increase the likelihood of outcome excitement.

A final pillar of outcome excitement previously identified is a strong confidence in the validity of the outcome. Consequently, a final set of strategies for promoting outcome excitement is to provide some validation of the materiality of the outcome. A practical way to do so is to make the outcome seem more concrete. A classic example is the giant check that lottery winners receive with their name on it. A related tactic is to dramatize the materialization of the outcome through various ceremonial means (e.g., drop of confetti, release of balloons, trophy ceremony, champagne celebration). Another form of outcome

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, the notion that external attribution of the desirable outcome tends to increase excitement does not mean that it is always desirable to promote such external attributions. For example, as discussed earlier, businesses interested in fostering feelings of pride may prefer that consumers make internal attributions of desirable outcomes.

validation is through social approval. The congratulations and supportive admiration that a woman receives from her friends when sharing the news of her engagement and showing her ring are classic forms of social validation and boosters of outcome excitement. Marketers often emulate this process when they congratulate consumers for certain purchases and give them assurance that the product they chose is very popular and has received high quality ratings. In amusement parks, the most popular and exciting rides typically involve a moment in which a photo is taken, which can be reviewed—and possibly purchased—by the riders at the end of the ride. The mere act of reviewing these photos provides a form of validation that the experience was genuinely fun and exciting—a validation that is further amplified if the consumer purchases the photo. Similarly, in gift-giving, a savvy consumer concerned about the recipient’s excitement would typically provide some form of validation of the gift (e.g., offering a product from a well-known brand, sharing the story behind a work of art). Finally, building on the observation that outcome excitement often rests on consumers’ belief that they will be able to reproduce the gratifying experience, marketers can bolster excitement with their products and services by instilling and reinforcing such belief. To do so, marketers would want to ensure that consumers attribute the desirable outcome to stable characteristics of the marketer itself (e.g., “This spinning class was great because the coach at my cycling studio is terrific”).

### **Relaxation**

Relaxation is another important emotional state for marketers. Large segments of industry revolve around promises of relaxation for consumers, including spas and massage parlors, hotels and resorts, vacation cruises and business-class air travel, yoga studios and meditation spaces, and relaxation music and aroma candles. Relaxation is generally conceived as a pleasurable, low-arousal (or low-activation) emotional state that is the opposite of feelings of tension, stress, and nervousness (Russell and Feldman Barrett 1999; Watson and Tellegen 1985). Other emotional states closely associated with relaxation include feelings of calmness and serenity. Whereas pride is a self-focused emotion, and excitement is an object- or stimulus-focused emotion, relaxation is a more general state fostered by an overall environment. Although relaxation is often considered an emotional state, as summarized by

Pham, Hung, and Gorn (2011), several streams of research suggest that it is better conceptualized as a multilayer state: At the physiological level relaxation is characterized by a reduced activation of the autonomic nervous system, whereas at the emotional level it is characterized by feelings of calmness and peacefulness, and at the cognitive level relaxation is characterized by a lack of worry and preoccupation, and a sense of detachment.

Because it reduces stress and tension (Benson 2000), frees the mind of worry and anxiety (Smith et al. 1996), and is associated with emotional calmness and peacefulness (Smith 1999), relaxation has been found to provide a variety of benefits for health and general well-being (Benson 2000; Lichstein 1988). Within marketing, relaxation has been found to improve overall customer experience and satisfaction in a variety of contexts (Alexandris and Palialia 1999; Huang and Hsu 2010; Loureiro, Almeida, and Rita 2013). Relaxation has also been found to increase consumers' monetary valuations and willingness to pay for various retail products (e.g., backpacks, cameras, scarves, picture frames) and services (e.g., gym memberships, vacation cruises, bungee jumping sessions; Pham et al. 2011).

#### An Integrative Theory of Relaxation: (I) The Pillars and Experience of Relaxation

A grounded theory analysis of more than 50 consumer accounts of relaxation experiences, combined with a critical review of the literature, leads us to propose an original integrative theory of relaxation, which distinguishes the experience of relaxation itself from the psychological processes by which relaxation is reached. With respect to the former, we conceptualize the overall experience of relaxation as emanating from the combination of three main psychological pillars—(a) safety, (b) peacefulness, and (c) physical comfort—resting on (d) a physiological substrate of reduced tension, as illustrated in Figure 3 (panel a).

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

*Reduced Tension.* The notion of reduced physiological tension as a dominant component of relaxation has a long history in the clinical literature on stress management (Lehrer, Woolfolk, and Sime 2007). Widely practiced relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation (Jacobson 1938) and controlled breathing mainly focus on this physiological component. Respondents' accounts of relaxing experiences regularly focused on tension release as a core constituent of their experiences:

- *...when I was on vacation...I had spent the day walking all over the place and looking at things. I had to spend a lot of time around other people too.... So, when I was finally able to get back to my hotel room, I took a shower and just collapsed onto the bed. It was just so nice to be done for the day.... I was so tired at that point that, being able to stop was just the thing that I needed. It felt so good to lay on that bed. (Female, 33)*
- *The other day I had come back from a 30-mile bike ride. I used this handheld massager that I have all over the aches and pains of my body. Before I was using it, I was very tense and full of knots. After using it however, my body was very relaxed and at ease. I was able to then do some yoga and stretching and to crack some pretty important joints in my body. It made a world of difference. (Male, 35)*
- *Sometimes I take melatonin and it totally relaxes me.... I usually take it one hour before bed, and by bed time, I am totally relaxed and ready for bed and a good night's sleep. (Female, 52)*

Although a significant portion of the relaxation literature focuses on the release of physiological tension, we believe that over and above a reduction of physiological tension, relaxation requires the three primary psychological pillars of safety, peacefulness, and physical comfort (see Figure 3, panel a).

*Feelings of Safety.* A recurring theme in reported experiences of relaxation is a general feeling of safety and absence of threat. This feeling of safety may come from a sense of security provided by the surrounding environment. For example, a child will feel more relaxed in the safety of her own home, with her parents nearby. Similarly, hotel guests will feel more relaxed and will be able to sleep better after properly locking the door of their room. The following account provides another illustration of this basic principle:

- *I spent last summer at an RV park with my niece. We had the camper to ourselves, and it was largely peaceful and quiet, and it was very safe. There was a lake for swimming which was a decent walking distance away from us, and small, safe roads where she could ride her scooter. (Male, 42)*

In marketplace and retail settings, the source of feelings of safety is often social. For example, being with a loved one can provide a sense of protection, allowing the person to relax.

- *I remember going to the movies with my boyfriend and seeing a scary movie. Normally, these movies wouldn't relax someone, but we both enjoy them a lot so they do not particularly scare us or stress us out.... The factors that were responsible for my relaxation were being with my boyfriend, going to a familiar place, enjoying a good*

*movie.... Each of these things are factors that would make me comfortable in many situations. (Female, 22)*

In addition, being with loved ones or with close others mitigates fear of not being accepted or being judged.

- *Sitting at the table, with my bride of 35 years (at the time), drinking a glass of pinot noir, and soaking in the conversation and atmosphere was unreal. We were completely relaxed and enjoying each other's company, as always...it was the type of relaxation which occurs when you are with someone who knows you so well you can completely be yourself and be completely loved and accepted. (Male, 64)*

Feelings of psychological safety can also arise from the social environment being welcoming, or being one in which people feel that they are not drawing unwanted attention.

- *The restaurant was the best I've been to yet. The place was clean, elegant and the food was amazing. The service was second to none and the people including staff made everyone feel like family. It was a complete relaxation.... The environment was the best and the staff made everyone feel at home with its excellent service. (Female, 33)*
- *I felt very relaxed when I was shopping at the Frankfurt airport between destinations. I had several hours until my next flight, so I walked around the airport looking at different items on display in the shops.... Somehow it was relaxing to be around people from all different origins and destinations who had no interest whatsoever in what I was doing. (Male, 27)*

*Feelings of Peacefulness.* A second recurring theme in reported experiences of relaxation is a general feeling of peacefulness and tranquility. Peacefulness often appears in studies of the correlates of relaxation (Gilbert et al. 2008; Tunney et al. 2017). A major contributor to feelings of peacefulness is the absence of aversive elements such as crowding, excessive noise, or excessive commotion. Not surprisingly, children are often mentioned as impediments to peacefulness in any setting, including marketplace settings. Below are some illustrative accounts:

- *I went to a restaurant by myself that had a nice waterfront view.... It was lunch time, and not particularly busy, and so I could relax.... One of the things that relaxed me was that there weren't a lot of people. Crowds and babble tend to put me on edge a bit, and so a relative serenity is very welcomed and relaxing. (Male, 34)*
- *I just got out of college for the summer.... Instead of staying in Tampa or going to Orlando, we drove to St. Petersburg and stayed in a hotel there for about a week. No Disney World crowds and tons of kids, no rushes of tourists, no heavy traffic. Just a relaxing vacation along the Atlantic Ocean before going home...mostly, it was a time for peace and relaxation. (Female, 25)*

Besides the absence of aversive elements, another source of feelings of peacefulness and tranquility is the presence of positive serenity-inducing stimuli, such as soothing music or other calming sounds (e.g., the trickle of raindrops, ocean waves, the chirping of birds), and expansive natural landscapes (e.g., mountains, valleys, starry sky; see Kaplan 1995).

- *I went to a new coffee shop recently and I found it so peaceful and relaxing inside. They had a lovely bubbling fountain as well as peaceful music playing.... I spent about an hour there as I was so relaxed and found it so peaceful...(Male, 34)*
- *I was very relaxed and at ease on my last vacation to the Bahamas.... Looking at the clear ocean water rejuvenated me.... The scenery in the Bahamas is beautiful. (Female, 39)*
- *...my favorite landscape was in World of Warcraft. The graphics of the game are realistic with just a slight hint of mysticism and wonder. Several landscapes in this game have given me a feeling of awe or tingling in the spine. I think my most memorable one is in Westfall. Looking across the desert plains with the wonderful music of Westfall playing in the background is an experience everyone should have. (Male, 31)*

*Physical Comfort.* Although rarely explicitly discussed as such in the relaxation literature, a third major recurring theme in reported experiences of relaxation is a notion of physical comfort. In relating their experiences of relaxation, many respondents explicitly mentioned specific elements that pertain to a notion of physical comfort, such as reclining seats in movie theaters, warm weather, or loose-fitting clothes. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of being genuinely relaxed without first being physically comfortable (e.g., taking a bubble bath in cold water; receiving a massage on a table that is too hard; not having a seat in an airport business lounge). Below are some illustrative examples:

- *In a movie theater, once the movie starts and I'm sitting in a comfortable chair to watch a good movie with my spouse or friend, I am probably as relaxed as I ever get. (Male, 27)*
- *I remember using the hot tub in my family's backyard a few years ago. It was one of the most relaxing experiences I've had in a very long time. The water was warm, and it had comfortable seating built into it. The water and bubbles made my arms and legs feel weightless, and the jets felt like a gentle massage against my back. I could stretch my legs out comfortably too and rest them on the seat across from me. (Female, 27)*
- *...when I had a mani-pedi at a local salon. It was one of the most relaxing times I've ever had. I was seated in a massaging chair and my feet were submerged in hot scented water while my fingernails were being soaked at the same time. (Female, 64)*

- *Both my friend and I got our nails done together. The chairs at the place were very comfortable and the place was very clean.... Once we were done for the massage, they gave us the most comfortable robes and the massage beds were also very comfortable. I remember the massage put me in state of complete relaxation... (Female, 33)*

As illustrated by these accounts, common themes in consumers' experiences of physical comfort and relaxation include warmth, water, and cleanliness, with obvious implications for various retail settings (e.g., hotels, restaurants, lounges, spas, pools, cruises).

*Personal Bubble.* The combination of feeling safe, peaceful, and physically comfortable can result in a pleasant sensation of being mentally isolated and protected from the surrounding environment. A fitting metaphor to describe this sensation would be the feeling of being in one's own "bubble." Interestingly, this sensation can be experienced even when surrounded by many other people.

- *Usually, theaters are designed so that other people's existence doesn't really bother you that much, so you feel like you're just sitting in that dark cold room alone.... The sounds from the movie are so loud and surround you that you just feel encapsulated in this room and nothing else matters. (Male, 27)*
- *I remember being at the mall and they had these chairs that shoppers could sit in to relax free of charge. I felt at ease while my friend went about their shopping experience. It was relaxing to watch all the people pass me by while I was in the ultimate comfort scenario...the chaotic atmosphere of the mall added to the experience. Watching people walk by while being in a sitting position is satisfying for some reason. I felt at ease knowing I could sit there while waiting. (Male, 23)*

The overall sensation of being in one's own bubble sets the stage for three major aspects of the phenomenology of feeling relaxed: subjective feelings of being carefree, perceptions of timelessness, and felt contentment.

*Feelings of Being Carefree.* A prominent aspect of the phenomenology of feeling relaxed is the sentiment of being carefree and unencumbered by any source of worry.

- *I never had a massage and I was extremely excited for it. It was more than what I expected. To say I felt relaxed and at ease is an understatement. I felt completely carefree for that 90 minutes and even after.... It felt amazing. The atmosphere was very relaxing and comfortable. (Male, 25)*
- *I booked a vacation at the Outer Banks and it provided me with a lot of relaxation.... It was relaxing because I could do what I wanted, when I wanted, without having to*

*worry about work or pleasing anyone else except for myself. I had a great time relaxing and having fun on my own terms. (Female, 30)*

The sentiment of being carefree can stem from being free of obligations, the delegation of one's responsibilities, being allowed to do whatever one wishes, or not having to worry about any consequences (e.g., the price to pay for a particular experience). Below are representative examples:

- *Well yesterday my husband booked me a spa day for Mother's Day.... Being able to get away from my motherly and wifely duties for 3 hours meant a lot to me.... Having someone do a service for me put me at ease. I didn't have to do anything but just lay or sit there and take everything in. (Female, 27)*
- *...I recently had a really great experience at a local Chilis Restaurant, of all places. I don't often eat there, but had some elderly family in town that doesn't like to eat anything non-American. Our server was incredibly kind and helpful.... I was able to relax and not worry about these elderly folks being taken care of...the biggest factor was how calm and collected our server was.... Our server...allowed the whole family to relax. (Male, 29)*
- *In the spring there is a local baseball team. You buy the tickets and sit on the grassy area with your blanket and chairs and watch the game...my daughter is allowed to go play in the area, it feels very relaxing...the lack of rigidity in the event... you pick a spot wherever you want.... There isn't assigned seats... (Female, 32)*
- *I enjoy getting the meals in a box that I signed up for.... One night I was cooking a steak meal from the service. I opened everything up, laid out all the ingredients and planned my strategy.... I was at ease knowing at the end of the preparation was going to be a healthy, delicious meal for myself and my other half. (Female, 64)*

*Perception of Timelessness.* A second major aspect of the phenomenology of genuine relaxation is a feeling of timelessness, a sensation of losing track of time, or a perception that time does not matter, as illustrated by the following accounts:

- *I went to Charming Charlies and I always seem to get lost in the store. I love going in there and it makes me feel very relaxed and calm looking at all the pretty things in there. I was in there so long that I lost track of time. By the time I realized how long I had been in there three hours had gone by and I was late for dinner. (Female, 46)*
- *I was also able to feel my face muscles relax as the lady is giving me my facial. It made me feel like I was in a different place and time. (Female, 35)*

The perception of timelessness is a common correlate of states of relaxation (Berkovich-Ohana et al. 2013; Hobbs 2010; Smith 2007). Within the marketing literature, it has been found that relaxation-inducing colors tend to decrease consumers' perceptions of elapsed time and therefore increase their patience in online settings (Gorn et al. 2004).

*Felt Contentment.* A third major aspect of the phenomenology of relaxation is a general feeling of contentment. In studies of the dimensional structure of emotions, relaxation and contentment, while distinct, tend to be positively correlated (Russell and Feldman Barrett 1999; Watson and Tellegen 1985). In our conceptualization, we consider feelings of contentment to be an integral component of the overall phenomenological experience of relaxation. That is, states of relaxation bring about subjective feelings of contentment.

- *Honestly the last time I felt really relaxed was the last time my husband and I took a cruise which was almost 10 years ago...overall it was very relaxing. We stayed on the ship most of the time and just hung out on our veranda deck and ordered meals to be delivered to our room. It was very enjoyable.* (Female, 42)
- *I walked to the local farmers market. Even though it was full of people, I felt myself relaxing as I walked through the market. I smiled, talked to people, and genuinely had a good time. I was calm, relaxed and stress free as I browsed through each booth. The day was sunny and warm and I was the most relaxed I have felt in a long time while shopping.* (Female, 49)
- *I always enjoy going [to a local baseball game] because I feel so relaxed when we go...and it makes me have a feeling of contentness with my life. I always enjoy it.* (Female, 32)

#### An Integrative Theory of Relaxation: (II) The Process of Relaxing

A second major component of our theory of relaxation is a proposed structure of the mental processes that give rise to genuine states of relaxation. As illustrated in Figure 3 (panel b), we conceptualize the overall process as a progression of six stages: (1) disengagement, (2) slowing down, (3) acceptance, (4) low-level attentional focus, (5) sensory openness, and (6) appreciation.

*Disengagement.* A basic requirement for the initiation of relaxation is an overall disengagement from the broader stress-inducing environment. Indeed, it is difficult to relax without distancing oneself from common sources of stress. As Smith (2007) observes, this disengagement can be physical or psychological. Examples of physical disengagement include

retreating to one's bedroom, going for a walk, and going away on a vacation. Examples of psychological disengagement include distancing oneself from ongoing issues, discharging oneself from certain responsibilities, disconnecting from emails, and more generally adopting a detached attitude. Correspondingly, a common admonition across various relaxation techniques is to “let go” of things (Lehrer, Woolfolk, and Sime 2007; Smith et al. 1996).

- *The time I feel relaxed most is when I play basketball. I feel calm and relaxed every time I play because when I do, I'm alone at first shooting around outside on a nice sunny day with a breeze...being by myself in the beginning because I like to listen to music while I play alone sometimes.* (Female, 21)
- *My husband and I booked a resort, right on the beach, and I enjoyed laying in the sun there with no stress and nothing on my mind.... It also helped that we did not get an international plan on our cell phones, so I could not be disturbed with calls or text messages. The fact that I was not worried about being contacted about something at home, such as work, or some family drama made my experience more enjoyable.* (Female, 39)
- *...I went to a spa for a facial and a massage.... Just the fact that I was able to have someone else take care of me for a moment was so relaxing. It made me feel like I could let go of all my worries and my concerns and just be at peace for the rest of the time. I was able to let my mind go and just feel the comfort of the massage.* (Female, 35)

The importance of physical and psychological disengagement in achieving relaxation has obvious business and retail applications. A variety of products have physical or psychological disengagement as part of their main value proposition, including noise-cancelling headphones, auto-response email functions, and various services that revolve around the delegation of tasks and responsibilities (e.g., concierge services, cleaning and home organization services, tax preparation services, food delivery services, etc.). Even products and services that are not specifically designed for the purpose of physical or psychological disengagement can be used by consumers to disengage from various stressors in their environment. For example, consumers can temporarily disconnect themselves by putting their phones on “airplane mode.” Similarly, in busy cities, overwhelmed consumers can retreat to retail venues such as art galleries and quiet stores to physically disengage from the stress inherent in crowded environments.

*Slowing Down.* Upon disengaging from various sources of stress in the environment, it is important that the person slows down. Indeed, relaxation typically requires low levels of

physiological arousal. Correspondingly, many relaxation techniques involve slow movements (e.g., Tai Chi, yoga) or prolonged stillness (e.g., meditation). Not surprisingly, many accounts of relaxation reported by our respondents make references to relatively slow-paced or sedentary experiences such as going on a cruise, receiving a massage, or watching a movie.

- *I spend a lot of time at a spa called Spa Castle. It...has many different rooms for guests to meditate in. You can certainly find a place in the building to relax and reflect.... I could feel the day melting away as I laid there. (Female, 40)*
- *[About watching TV all day at home] ... I took a shower just to put pajamas back on. We never have such lazy days sitting in front of the TV, and we both really enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun for both of us since usually we are both very busy people... I was able to just sit back and enjoy the time with my fiance. Most days I'm racing from one thing to the next, even on the weekends. (Female, 36)*

*Acceptance.* An important but often underappreciated stage in the attainment of true relaxation is the acceptance of the relaxing moment. It is difficult to relax unless one is open to being relaxed and one embraces the opportunity to do so. Consistent with this view, conceptualizations of mindfulness, a close correlate of relaxation, emphasize the importance of “being experientially open to the reality of the present moment” (Roemer and Orsillo 2002; see also Bishop et al. 2004). This acceptance can be embraced spontaneously by the consumer, as illustrated by the first two examples below, or can actually be forced upon the consumer, as illustrated in the latter two examples.

- *...one time I felt great sense of relaxation was on the Key West Express [a high-speed ferry in South Florida]...it was very relaxing. I don't need to worry about driving, the traffic, I can just sit there and watch the ocean and waves.... I fell asleep for like 30 min then I woke up and we were still on the water. It was a great feeling! (Male, 29)*
- *The person who was giving me my massage was very personable and she had very soft hands.... When I was there, my mind was able to turn off all the noise in my life to enjoy the current moment. (Female, 33)*
- *Massage services are great at creating feelings of relaxation ... The environment they put you in and what they do to you just forces you to relax. (Male, 27)*
- *I think that mani-pedi spas and shops are excellent at creating feelings of relaxation and peace in their customers.... There's not much you can do but relax during these services as you are restricted from walking around and you can't do anything with your hands. (Female, 64)*

*Low-level Attentional Focus.* Once the person has accepted to concentrate on the present moment, he or she needs to focus on some benign stimulus or activity that can sustain his or her attention without requiring too much cognitive effort or physical energy. This low-level refocus of attention enables further disengagement from sources of stress, decreasing activity of the sympathetic nervous system and increasing activation of the parasympathetic nervous system (Gevirtz 2007; McGrady 2007). In formal relaxation and meditative techniques, a low-level refocus of attention may involve concentrating on one's breathing, repeating mantras, sustained gazing at a specific object, or intentionally tensing and relaxing major muscle groups (Lichstein 1988). In everyday relaxation behavior, typical activities for low-level attentional focus include listening to music, watching television, browsing social media feeds, people-watching, and contemplating nature. Below are illustrative examples from respondents' accounts:

- [About going to a movie theater]...*enjoying what you're watching and absentmindedly eating your snack. Usually, nothing else crosses my mind or bothers me during this time.* (Male, 27)
- *Just dribbling the ball while I walk to the store is even relaxing. It keeps my mind focused off of other things.* (Female, 21)
- [About visiting a spa center]...*I was able to lay there and listen to meditation mantras in peace.* (Female, 40)
- [About people-watching in a mall] *It was relaxing to watch all the people pass me by while I was in the ultimate comfort scenario.* (Male, 23)

*Sensory Openness.* The process of relaxation is generally facilitated by an openness and attention to one's own senses. Various relaxation methods call upon some form of sensory awareness such as monitoring one's breathing, controlling one's core balance, or sensing the tension and relaxation of one's muscles. In everyday life, relaxation can be enhanced through heightened awareness of different sensory experiences, whether they be olfactory (e.g., inhaling the fresh air of the sea or forest), tactile (e.g., feeling the gentle pressure of a massage or the warmth of the sun on one's skin), auditory (e.g., listening to the soothing sound of the rain or to soft music), or visual (e.g., watching the ocean or star-gazing). Correspondingly, respondents' accounts of relaxing experiences frequently mentioned sensory experiences:

- *I had a makeover for a wedding where I was a bridesmaid.... Something about sitting there under the dryer waiting for my highlights to dry was just so relaxing. The heat felt good, my skin felt cleansed. (Female, 30)*
- *[About having a meal at a waterfront restaurant]...I could relax and just hear the sound of the water and some seagulls cawing (or whatever you call the sound that Seagulls make). (Male, 34)*
- *The sand was pillowy soft, light beige, and warm. It was always a relaxing time just laying on the beach in the sun and then dipping into the gentle ocean. The sounds of the wave rolling in the ocean and onto the beach was hypnotizing and lulled me to sleep sometimes on my beach towel. (Female, 25)*

*Appreciation.* A final stage in the process of relaxation is the conscious appreciation and savoring of the relaxing experience. It is this conscious appreciation of the momentary experience that enables the subjective feeling of contentment typically accompanying genuine relaxation.

- *...I was taking some vacation in the Dominican Republic where my childhood best friend lived...after like not seeing each other for more than 5 years.... What really made me feel relaxed and also comfortable at that moment was the simple feeling of kind of having in your mind that confidence and happiness that you are spending one of the best days with someone you love so much... (Female, 21)*
- *My husband and I went to lunch last weekend and we were seated upstairs in a quiet corner of the restaurant.... It is not very easy for us to have the money to go out so when we do go out it's always more enjoyable when we can truly have a relaxing experience together...it's always a treat, so we take advantage of the time together to really enjoy our meal and our time. (Female, 37)*
- *I like to go sit at Barnes and Noble or any bookstore and drink a latte and read. This is very calming to me. I find peace in sitting and reading and listening to quiet surroundings. I also like the sound of others quietly talking or laughing and the smell of coffee brewing makes me feel good. (Female, 45)*

Because relaxation requires some appreciation and savoring of the experience, it is often facilitated by the consumption of small indulgences, as illustrated by the following accounts:

- *...my fiance and I took a Sunday and just sat on the couch all day, watching movies streamed through Netflix on our smart TV. We watched nearly a whole season of our favorite show, and I made a beef stew that cooked in the crock pot all day. It was relaxing and fun... (Female, 36)*
- *I ordered a small container of popcorn, and a soft drink, and sat down in the middle of the theater to watch the movie. There were only a few other people there and they all*

*sat really far apart from everyone else, so I felt very comfortable and at ease. (Male, 32)*

- *... it was a 7 day cruise to Puerto Rico.... We went up on the Serenity deck..., they had huge loungers with sun shade over top, they brought us some Pina Coladas, I kicked my feet up, enjoyed the ocean breeze and the taste of coconut in my drink, it was a great week... (Female, 52)*

*Intentionality.* The overall process of relaxing, from initial disengagement from the environment to appreciation of the relaxing experience, generally requires some volitional intent. In other words, successful relaxation usually entails some conscious intention to relax.

Correspondingly, many relaxation techniques, from progressive muscle relaxation to yoga and meditation, rest on individuals' volition to alter their mental or physical state. Not surprisingly, intentions to relax and conscious assessments of conditions that would facilitate relaxation often transpire in respondents' accounts:

- *YouTube is great at creating relaxation. You can stream any type of video that you prefer, from ASMR to meditation videos, to even ambient noise videos to help you relax, unwind, and even go to sleep. I use YouTube every night to listen to soft music to help me fall asleep. (Female, 36)*
- *A product [for] creating feelings of relaxation is my Nintendo Switch. I love the...Mario games.... It is not too hard, sometimes it involves some challenges but not the one that will make me sweaty. (Male, 29)*
- *This will sound silly, but I always liked bubbles in my bath, and Mr. Bubble (or other brands of bubbling soap) have long been a part of my bath rituals. If I'm going to soak in the tub, I'm able to relax more with my familiar suds surrounding me. (Male, 52)*

### Propositions on the Engineering of Relaxation

Our proposed theory of relaxation has clear implications as to how consumer relaxation can be induced or facilitated in various marketplace and retail settings. Some of these practical implications are obvious and already well established; others are less evident.

*Standard Means of Promoting Relaxation.* A standard means of promoting relaxation in the marketplace is to facilitate consumers' disengagement from common sources of stress in their environment. This includes physical isolation (e.g., VIP lounges in airports or other venues, "executive" floors in hotels, first- or business-class air travel, private dining rooms in restaurants, mountain retreats, vacation resorts on remote islands); crowd control (e.g., in luxury stores,

parks, beaches, museums); noise control (e.g., quiet cars in trains, no-phone policies in movie theaters or yoga studios, soundproofing in hotels, noise-canceling headphones); and various ways to disconnect from the busy world (e.g., turning one's phone off, email auto-responses, going "off the grid" on social media, going on a camping trip, going on a scenic hike). Another standard means is to promote physical comfort during the consumption experience (e.g., reclining chairs in movies, comfortable sofas at cafes, fully reclining business-class seats, high-quality linen and bedding in hotels, comfortable bathrobes at spas, cabanas on beaches, room temperature and humidity control). A third method is through the engineering of consumption atmospherics (e.g., soothing music, nature sounds, calming scents, soft lighting, relaxing colors, attentive flight attendants or other service providers; minimalist, uncluttered aesthetics). A fourth method is through various relaxation-inducing substances (e.g., chamomile tea, alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis, melatonin, sleeping aids, Dream Water). A final set of methods is through the fostering of low-level attentional focus, which is the basis of various large industries (e.g., television, YouTube, light reads, music subscription services, casual gaming apps, board games, music instruments, in-flight entertainment systems, fidget spinners). Note that certain consumption-based means of relaxing through low-level attentional focus are not necessarily commercial. For instance, consumption activities such as driving, going on a bicycle ride, knitting, or cooking, which are typically thought of in terms of their primary function, can also provide relaxation through their capacity to sustain low levels of attentional engagement.

*Additional Means of Promoting Relaxation.* Our proposed theory suggests additional means of facilitating relaxation, some of which may be less evident. A first set of strategies leverages the intentionality and acceptance stage of the relaxation process by encouraging a relaxation-oriented mindset. One way of doing so is to promote the engagement of certain rituals that are typically associated with relaxation. For example, most people follow specific scripts before going to sleep (e.g., putting their pajamas on, drinking a glass of warm milk, brushing their teeth, reading a book). Similarly, most frequent travelers follow a set routine on long flights (e.g., taking their shoes off, getting their tablets out, putting their headphones on, adjusting their neck pillows). In general, facilitating the reproduction of such rituals should help pave the way for subsequent relaxation. The common practice of wearing comfortable clothes on weekends is consistent with this notion. In retail settings, the "turn down" service often offered at high-end hotels can also be seen as an attempt to leverage this notion.

Another strategy is to enhance people's appreciation of the moment, which can be done with the provision of small indulgences. This is a common practice in industries where promises of relaxation are central to the offer. For example, in luxury hotels, arriving guests are often offered a welcome drink when checking in, as are business-class air travelers upon boarding. Similarly, many massage places and spas offer complimentary drinks and snacks to their guests. The importance of small indulgences for the appreciation of relaxing experiences explains the effectiveness of certain retail arrangements such as concession stands in movie theaters and pool-side bars at resorts. The supply of small indulgences as a means to foster relaxation need not be restricted to industries where relaxation is a central promise (e.g., travel, hospitality, wellness). This strategy can also be used in industries where relaxation, though not central to the promise, nevertheless contributes to the overall customer experience. For example, some luxury car dealerships have designated lounges stocked with refreshments and snacks where customers can wait for their cars. Any business where customers typically have to wait (e.g., doctor's office, hospitals, hairdressers) could presumably offer some small indulgences (e.g., water bottles, candies) to help their customers feel more relaxed while waiting. Low-brow "gossip" magazines in doctors' waiting rooms and hair salons can be regarded as primitive examples of this strategy at work.

A third set of strategies involves the important but often overlooked role of a subjective sense of safety in experiences of relaxation. In industries where relaxation is a central promise—for instance, vacation resorts, cruises, spas, or yoga studios—it is important to establish an overall sense of security. Prevalent examples include lifeguards on duty at pools and beaches, visible lifeboats and life-savers on cruise ships, security patrols at vacation resorts, safety demonstrations on airplanes, and hotel in-room safes and security locks. Along with standard forms of safety assurance, a relaxing sense of safety can be promoted by tapping into other psychological constructs. One of these constructs is trust. Consumers receiving a massage, attending a yoga class, or listening to a meditation tape are more likely to feel safe and comfortable, and hence relaxed, if they fully trust the experience provider (e.g., a licensed masseuse, a celebrity yoga instructor, a meditation guru). Another safety-related construct is privacy. Consumers are more likely to feel safe and relaxed if their privacy is protected during the focal experience. For example, hotels typically use a variety of means to protect their guests' privacy (e.g., not disclosing the room number of particular guests, window curtains, do-not-

disturb signs, sound-proofing); massage establishments provide covering towels during massages; and business-class seats on airplanes often have small partitions. Cleanliness is a third safety-related construct, one often mentioned in respondents' accounts. For relaxation-experience providers such as hotels, cruises, spas, and restaurants, perceived cleanliness is paramount, because it is nearly impossible to feel completely relaxed and trusting in a setting that does not feel clean.

A sense of safety is also valuable in other industries where customer relaxation is important, although not central to the focal service. In settings where consumers receive various services and often have to wait—such as banks, public transit, doctors' offices, hospitals, airports and airplanes, or government agencies—relaxation can substantially enhance the customer experience. In such settings, various factors that are known to contribute to a general sense of safety—such as predictability, order and structure, trust, personal space, privacy, and cleanliness—can help customers relax. For example, in hospitals, perceived cleanliness and orderliness are important contributors to the degree to which patients and visitors find the environment less stressful. In the same vein, on airplanes, the pilot's opening intercom announcements—with their distinctively confident tone—are meant in part to provide some form of reassurance to passengers and help them feel more at ease. In the New York City subway system, the installation of countdown clocks displaying the expected arrival time of the next trains, thus making the subway experience feel more predictable, has greatly helped ease the stress of subway riders (despite the documented worsening of the system's reliability).

An important consideration in the marketing of consumer experiences related to relaxation is the pricing of the experience and the mode of payment. Knowing that a given experience, no matter how pleasant, entails a high price to pay will obviously inhibit consumers' enjoyment of the experience and the degree to which they will find it relaxing. Similarly, *not* knowing in advance the actual price of the experience may also detract from full enjoyment of the experience. These seemingly contradictory issues both arise because a core pillar of relaxation is an absence of threat. Both conscious awareness of having to pay a high price and uncertainty about how much the experience will actually cost undermine the ability to feel carefree during the experience. Therefore, pricing strategies that are more compatible with experiences of relaxation are those in which the price is not too high or not too salient, yet transparent. Common strategies for implementing this general principle involve prepayment for the experiences and

decoupling the payment from the experience itself (see Prelec and Loewenstein 1998). For example, instead of paying for individual yoga sessions, a consumer may prefer to buy a package of classes in advance (prepayment) or purchase a membership (decoupling). Similarly, instead of paying for a drink at a hotel bar, a hotel guest may elect to charge it to his or her room (decoupling). Instead of paying for access to airport lounges per visit, many travelers rely on some form of membership (prepayment). All-inclusive vacation resorts draw their appeal from both the decoupling of consumption and payment, and prepayment. Beyond pricing, if a marketer wants to maximize consumer relaxation, it is generally helpful to downplay the commercial and transactional aspects of the experience. For example, receiving an unsolicited ad while browsing one's Facebook feed tends to disrupt one's relaxing experience. It is one of the reasons why museum stores are generally located outside the main exhibition areas.

Other core elements of experiences of relaxation point to additional practical implications. For example, the principle of timelessness implies that visible clocks and other reminders of time ought to be avoided in places meant for relaxation (e.g., spas, yoga studios, bars, restaurants). The principle of peacefulness supports the allure of simplicity as a value proposition for general relaxation. The meteoric success of Marie Kondo, the home-organization guru, can be explained by the appeal of simplicity and decluttering for modern consumers in need of relaxation. Acts of ostensible benevolence by service providers (e.g., a store employee going “out of her way” to help a consumer; a server who is exceptionally patient toward elderly restaurant patrons or children) can also enhance consumer relaxation by contributing to a sense of security.

*Relaxation Hubs.* By conceptualizing and clarifying the experience of relaxation, and suggesting different ways in which consumer relaxation may be engineered, the theory of relaxation summarized in Figure 3 helps identify potent cradles of relaxation—places and objects that naturally project core elements of relaxation. We call these relaxation hubs. The first and most obvious relaxation hub is nature: Nature is the quintessential place for disengagement and disconnection; serene nature calls for slowing down; observing nature fosters low-level attentional focus; nature invites sensory openness; serene nature is peaceful and timeless; and all of the above evoke feelings of contentment. Related to the idea of nature, a second relaxation hub is the classic Zen garden: It is a place for disengagement and peaceful appreciation; it invites stillness, attentional focus, and sensory openness; it fosters timelessness and serves as a small self-contained “bubble” for contemplation. A less obvious but nevertheless effective relaxation

hub is the traditional fireplace: It encourages disengagement from the world and slowing down; it invites low-level engagement with the sound, glow, and warmth of the fire; it inspires appreciation of the moment; and the consumption of the burning energy serves as a symbolic reminder of one's slowly dissipating tension. Another relaxation hub that is not initially evident is a well-designed fish tank: It is a representation of nature; it epitomizes slowness of movement and stillness; it invites low-level attentional engagement; and it is quiet and peaceful; moreover, as noted earlier, water in and of itself is strongly associated with relaxation.

Recent research by Melumad and Pham (2019) has identified a fifth relaxation hub, one that was previously unsuspected: the smartphone. Smartphones are potent providers of relaxation. They enable disengagement from the world; they encourage mindless sustained attention; they provide a psychological bubble where people feel safe and comforted; and they provide virtually unlimited access to content, thus promoting a sense of timelessness. Because of these properties, smartphones tend to function as “adult pacifiers,” offering comfort, relaxation, and stress reduction (Melumad and Pham 2019). This notion helps explain the dramatic increase in time that consumers spend on their smartphone observed in recent years. A final relaxation hub that is worthy of recognition is not a place or an object, but a psychological state: nostalgia. As an emotional state, nostalgia shares many of the core components of relaxation: It involves a disengagement from mundane or unwanted realities of the present; it requires slowing down; it evokes a sense of fluidity of time; and it creates a psychological bubble where people feel safe and comfortable as they reminisce about past experiences of contentment. Therefore, another means of inducing states of relaxation is to elicit nostalgia.

Conceptually, any of the hubs identified in this section can be incorporated in marketplace and retail contexts where relaxation is central to the overall offering. For example, a small Zen garden within a restaurant, fireplaces in hotel lobbies, aquariums in airport lounges, or reminders of nature in spas can all potentially contribute to consumer relaxation.

## **Conclusion**

Although the literature on emotion and consumer behavior has grown considerably in the past 30 years, we know much more about the effects of emotions on consumer behavior than we do about the phenomenology of consumer emotions and how such emotions arise in the

marketplace. From a business standpoint, understanding the phenomenology and marketplace triggers of consumer emotions is at least as important as understanding the consequences of these emotions. Indeed, theoretically, marketers have greater potential control over the elicitation of certain consumer emotions (e.g., through product or service design, product or service delivery, retail environment, merchandising, overall positioning) than they do over the consequences of these emotions once experienced by the consumers. In this respect, the extant literature on emotion in psychology, although extensive, is not particularly helpful for several reasons. First, the emotions typically discussed in the psychological literature (e.g., fear, anger, anxiety, guilt, depression) are not always pertinent to consumer behavior. Second, even when they are, they are typically not studied in marketplace context (e.g., test anxiety, clinical phobias, post-natal depression). Finally, the way in which emotions are typically conceptualized in the psychological literature, which mostly revolves around notions of appraisals (e.g., Lazarus 1991; Roseman 1984), is too abstract to be easily applied in business and retail settings.

This fundamental gap between what marketers ideally should know about consumer emotions and what the current literature has to offer highlights the importance of research investigations such as the one reported in this article. Compared to traditional academic consumer studies, the present research has a unique combination of qualities: (a) it is genuinely grounded in real-life consumption experiences and consumption journeys; (b) it offers a systematic conceptualization of the phenomena of interest; and (c) it provides detailed and actionable recommendations for marketers and retailers.

Our exploratory analyses provide three major insights for business practitioners. First, it is critical to distinguish among the different types of positive emotions that consumers may experience in the marketplace. As documented in this article, positive emotions such as pride, excitement, and relaxation are fundamentally distinct, both in terms of their experience and their antecedent conditions. Even within the general notion of “excitement,” it is important to distinguish among anticipatory excitement, immersive excitement, and outcome excitement. Marketers and retailers interested in engineering any one of these emotional experiences would need to leverage triggers that are substantially different.

Second, it is important to realize that opportunities to engineer these emotions in the marketplace are generally greater during the various consumption stages of the overall consumer

journey than during the pre-purchase stages of the classic “customer journey,” which is typically defined more narrowly around the path to purchase (e.g., need recognition, search, consideration of alternatives, etc.). As illustrated by many examples of real-life accounts reported in this article, consumers’ experiences of pride, excitement, and relaxation in the marketplace predominantly revolve around the actual consumption of products and services, rather than around the process of purchasing these products and services. Nevertheless, some emotional experiences identified in this research do relate to paths to purchase (e.g., anticipatory excitement while waiting in line to purchase a new product; pride at finding a great deal; previously documented effects of relaxation on willingness to pay). Therefore, marketers and retailers interested in creating consumer value by engineering these positive emotions need to consider the full consumption journey as opposed to the more narrowly defined path to purchase.

A third major insight from this research is that the engineering of specific emotional experiences such as pride, excitement, or relaxation does not rest on “silver bullets.” That is, one typically cannot generate such complex emotions using any single tactic (e.g., attempting to elicit anticipatory excitement solely by using tension-inducing drumrolls). Instead, marketers and retailers should use a *combination* of tactics in order to reliably elicit the specific emotional experiences that they are interested in creating. To this end, the different emotion process models discussed in this article, and summarized in Figures 1 to 3, can serve as blueprints for designing integrated emotion engineering strategies. The concept of relaxation hubs (e.g., Zen gardens, fireplaces, fish tanks) uncovered in our research is a compelling illustration of the importance of integrating multiple emotion triggers in order to effectively induce specific emotions.

While we focused on the analysis of consumer pride, excitement, and relaxation, similar analyses can be extended to other consumption-relevant positive emotions such as nostalgia, romance, and comfort. We are cautiously hopeful that this article will pave the way for significant advancements in our collective understanding of the experience and engineering of consumer emotions in the marketplace.

Figure 1

Dynamics of Consumer Pride

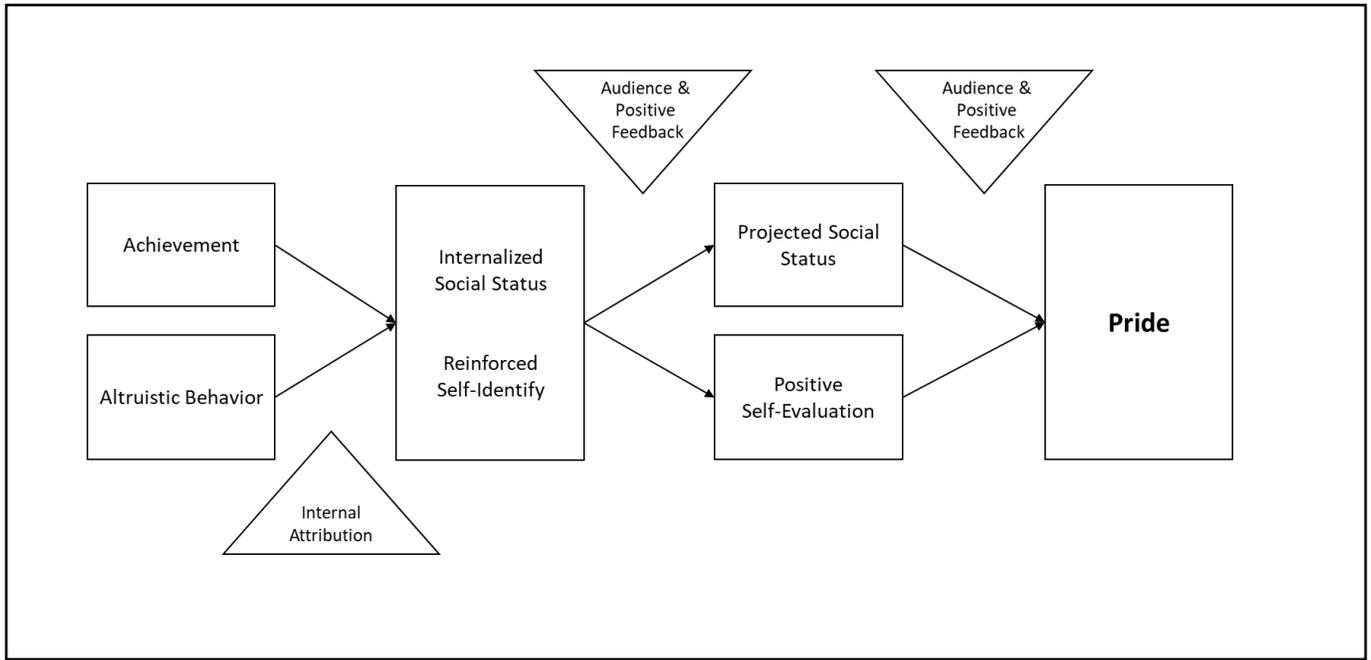
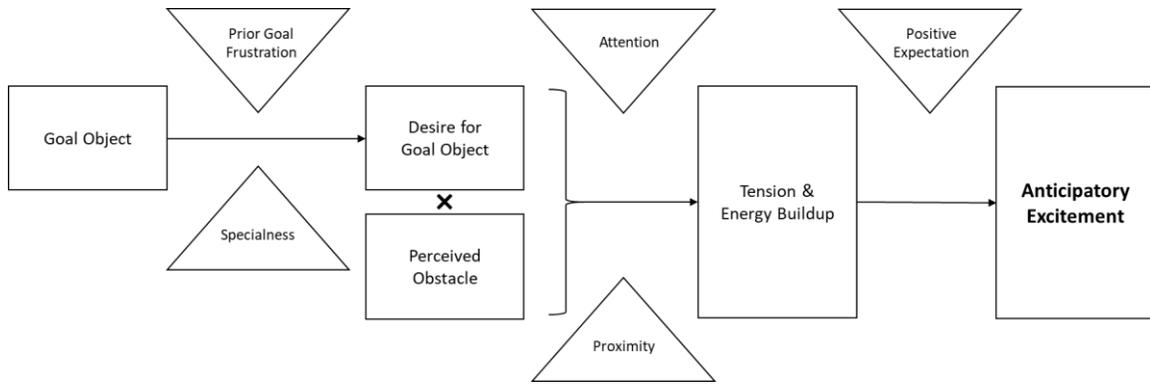
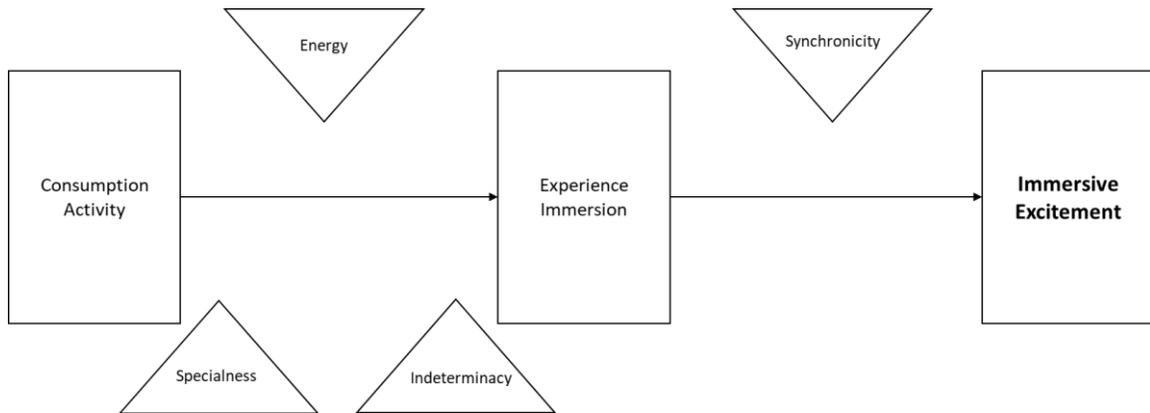


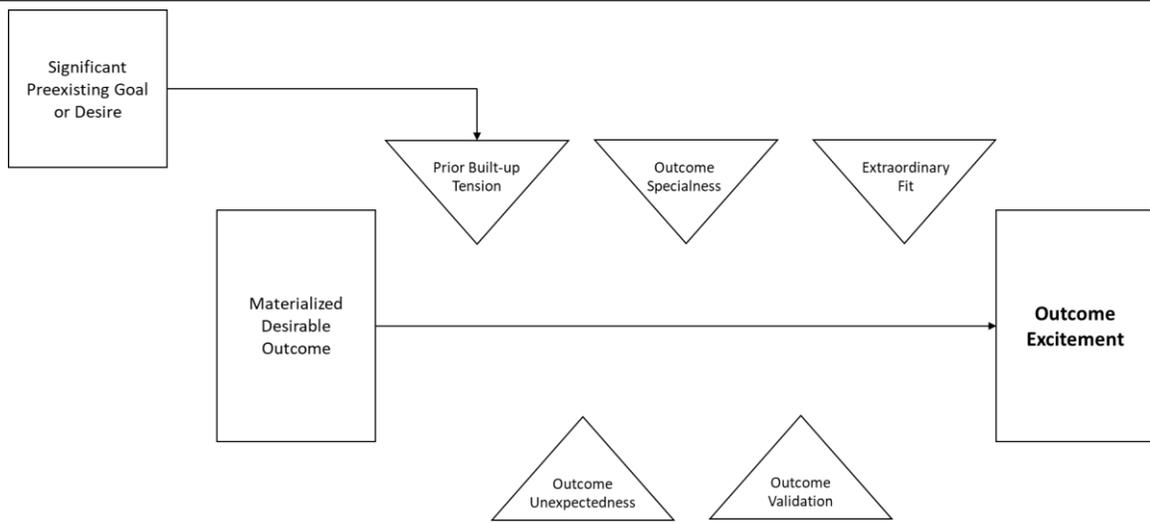
Figure 2  
Dynamics of Consumer Excitement



A: Anticipatory Excitement

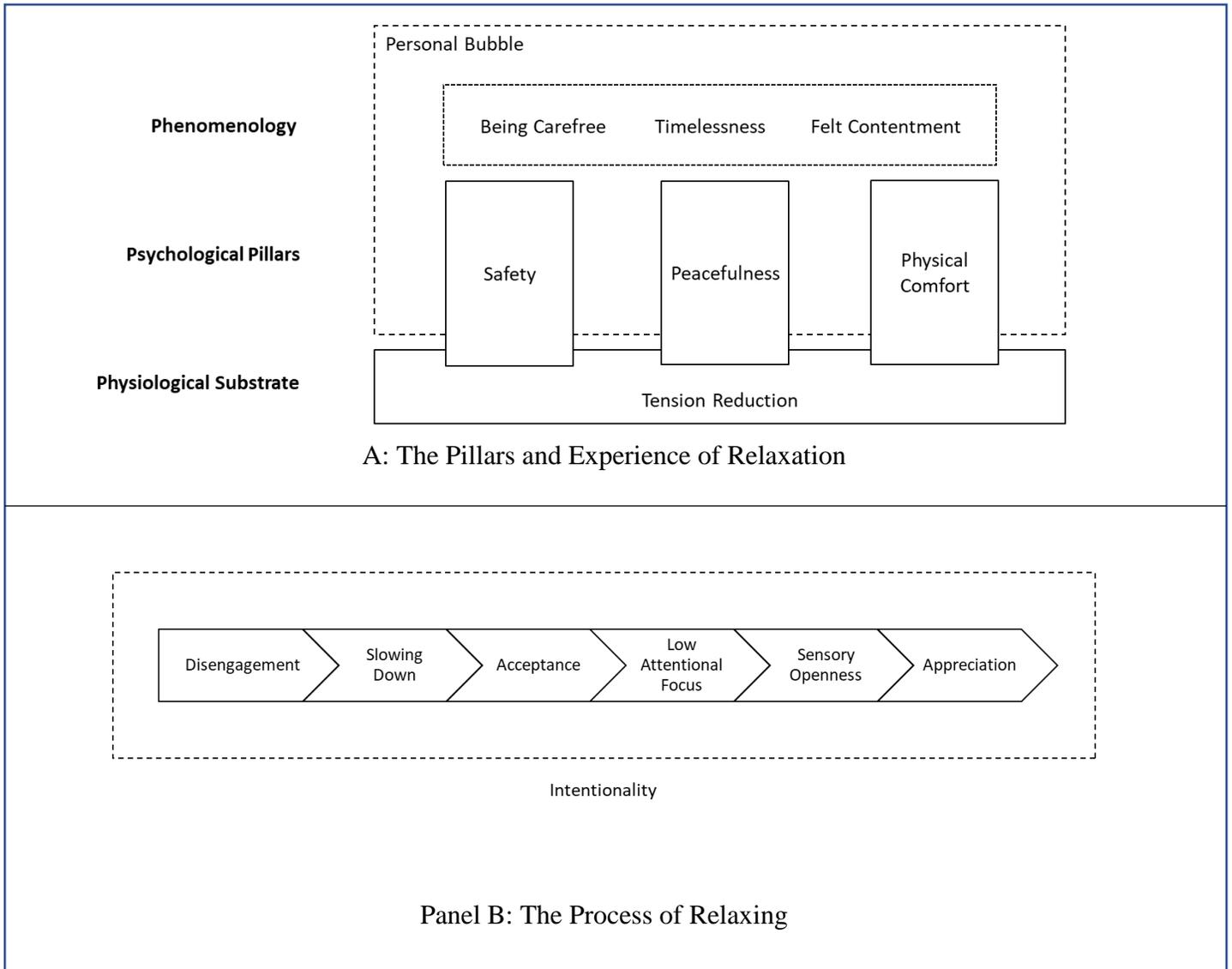


B: Immersive Excitement



C: Outcome Excitement

Figure 3  
Dynamics of Consumer Relaxation



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