
**Understanding Hope and
its Implications for
Consumer Behavior:
I Hope, Therefore
I Consume**

Understanding Hope and its Implications for Consumer Behavior: I Hope, Therefore I Consume

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Understanding Hope and its Implications for Consumer Behavior: I Hope, Therefore I Consume

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Abstract

Building on prior work (MacInnis and de Mello (2005) ‘The concept of hope and its relevance to product evaluation and choice’. *Journal of Marketing* **69**(January), 1–14; de Mello and MacInnis (2005) ‘Why and how consumers hope: Motivated reasoning and the marketplace’. *Inside Consumption: Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*, S. Ratneshwar and D. G. Mick (eds.). London/New York: Routledge, pp. 44–66), the authors argue that the concept of hope is highly relevant to consumer behavior and marketing, though its study has not yet appeared in these literatures. Complicating this study is that the definition of hope across literatures is inconsistent. The purpose of this conceptual article is to articulate the concept of hope and elucidate its relevance to consumer behavior. We do so in six sections. The first section explores the conceptual meaning of hope. A definition of hope and the constituent elements

that underlie it is articulated. We compare this definition to ones provided elsewhere and differentiate hope from related terms like wishing, expectations, involvement, and faith. The second section focuses on what consumers hope for. The third section considers several important consumer relevant outcomes of hope, including biased processing and self-deception, risk taking behavior, product satisfaction, and life satisfaction and materialism. The fourth section addresses the extent to which marketers are purveyors of hope and what tactics they use to induce hope in consumers. The fifth section uses the conceptualization of hope to both discuss novel ways of measuring hope and their comparisons to existing hope measures. The final section addresses a set of interesting, yet unresolved questions about hope and consumer behavior.

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Introduction

One notable human capacity is the ability to look to the future and aspire to achieve desired states. A majority of our behaviors such as applying cosmetics, reading self-help books, buying lottery tickets, and investing in the stock market betrays what we hope for, instead of what we are and where we are. The boundary of hope goes beyond what we hope for ourselves (e.g., hopes to make money, have fun, look more beautiful, find psychological happiness); we hope for our families (making life better for one's kids), hope for social groups (hoping one's team will win the game), and hope for our society (enhancing peace, social welfare).

Hoping that betterment of our lives will come true, we turn to the marketplace and strive to buy our dream. Indeed, the marketplace provides rich sources of hope and invites us to the endless pursuit of happiness. By selling hope as a marketable entity, the "beauty" industry, for instance, runs a profitable business. Cosmetic companies, pharmaceuticals, spas, beauty parlors, and magazines and books are only a few examples of this industry, which promote ways to better look, improve romantic relationships with a partner, and enhanced self-worth.

2 Introduction

Hope also finds relevance within a broader realm of human behavior. Along with faith and charity, it is one of the three fundamental theological Christian virtues (Averill et al., 1990, Moltmann, 1980). Tiger (1979) surmises that religions arose from a biological need individuals have to feel hope.

Despite its relevance to human behavior in general and consumer behavior in particular, little has been written about the concept of hope. Some 40 years ago, Cohen (1958) observed, “Although life without hope is unthinkable, psychology without hope is not, judging by the conspicuous absence of any study of hope from the literature” (pg. 10). Little has changed in the status of the study of hope in the interim, as Lazarus (1999a) expounds, “With a modest number of exceptions . . . there has been a great reluctance on the part of psychologists to address the concept of hope” (pg. 653). Furthermore, though some researchers recognize its importance, definitions in the psychology, sociology, philosophy, medical, and religion literatures often conceptualize hope in different ways. Nunn (1996) views hope as “a general tendency to construct and respond to the perceived future positively” (pg. 228). Snyder et al. (1996) define hope as a cognitive set comprising agency and pathways to reach goals. Pieper (1994) regards hope as an emotion that occurs when what one is expecting is good, signifying all that one longs for. Stotland (1969) equates hope with expectations and importance. Furthermore, a number of terms bear seeming relationship to hope, though they are not typically distinguished from hope: wishing, wanting, optimism, expectations, and faith. Thus, we are left wondering, “what is *hope*?” and “how is hope relevant to consumer behavior and marketing?”

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to shed light on the relevance and importance of hope to consumer behavior. We do so in six chapters. The first chapter explores the conceptual meaning of hope. A definition of hope and the constituent elements that underlie it is articulated. We compare this definition to ones provided elsewhere and differentiate hope from related terms like wishing, expectations, and faith. The second chapter focuses on what consumers hope for. The third chapter considers several (though not all) important consumer relevant outcomes of hope, including biased processing and self-

deception, risk taking behavior, product satisfaction, and life satisfaction and materialism. The fourth chapter addresses the extent to which marketers are purveyors of hope and what tactics they use to induce hope in consumers. The fifth chapter uses the conceptualization of hope to both discuss novel ways of measuring hope and their comparisons to existing hope measures. The final chapter addresses a set of interesting, yet unresolved questions about hope and consumer behavior.

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