

“Under Pleasure, Pushing Down On Me”: When Focusing on (Kinetic) Pleasure Prevents (Static) Pleasure

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Abstract

Every day, marketing messages encourage consumers to keep chasing “just one more” moment of pleasure – one more chip, one more episode, one more scroll. We argue that this kinetic focus on continuous, momentary pleasure can paradoxically undermine people’s overall state of enjoyment. Building on Epicurean philosophy, we distinguish static pleasure (a calm state of satisfaction from the absence of discomfort) from kinetic pleasure (active sensory engagement that requires ongoing stimulation) and propose that directing consumers’ attention to static pleasure enhances their overall enjoyment. Across two studies, we test whether a static-pleasure focus, versus a kinetic-pleasure focus, improves hedonic outcomes without requiring longer or more intense consumption. In a pizza-eating scenario (Study 1, $n = 102$), participants instructed to imagine eating until they felt comfortably satisfied (static focus) predicted higher total pleasure and indicated they would eat fewer slices than participants instructed to eat as long as eating felt pleasurable (kinetic focus). In a video-watching context (Study 2, $n = 209$), conducted at the end of demanding lab sessions, participants instructed to focus on relief from boredom (static focus) reported more fun from the video than those instructed to focus on how much pleasure they felt (kinetic focus), even though viewing time did not differ across conditions. Together, these findings suggest that cultivating a static-pleasure mindset may help consumers enjoy experiences more while avoiding overconsumption, with important implications for consumer well-being and the design of marketing communications.

Track: Consumer Behaviour