Chapter 5

Summary and General Discussion
"Hunger howls, hunger's red
Hunger stays till it's fed
Then it some h-h-how fades
Then it somehow leaves your sight
Depending on its appetite
Depending on your appetite."

‘Appetite’ Prefab Sprout

The overall aim of this dissertation was to investigate how goal pursuit and the pursuit of desire (specifically active goal pursuit vs. goal completion, Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010; 2011 and unfulfilled vs. fulfilled desire, Belk, Ger and Askegaard, 2003) shape consumer responsiveness to subtle marketing cues such as priming procedures (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) or assortment cues (Chapter 3). By incorporating a more dynamic, flexible, and motivationally malleable perspective on consumer susceptibility to the influence of subtle marketing cues on judgment, decision-making and, ultimately, behavior, this dissertation sheds more light on daily choices and decisions made by the context-driven consumer. It demonstrates how underlying motivations resulting from the pursuit of desire (Chapter 2) or goal pursuit (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) either facilitate consumer responsiveness to subtle marketing cues or rather, on the contrary, attenuate this subtle influence on consumer decision-making. This chapter provides a summary of the findings presented in the previous chapters. Additionally, it sketches both theoretical and practical reflections and implications of the research projects described in this dissertation, predominantly emphasizing the contributions for both research and practice.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.1.1 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 zooms in on consumer susceptibility to priming procedures. By looking at priming from the perspective of desire (hot, appetitive state; Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003), Chapter 2 provides more fine-grained expectations with respect to the effectiveness of
priming effects. It demonstrates not only when consumers fall prey to the subtle influence of primes and behave in a prime-consistent manner, but also when consumers become resistant to the subtle influence of priming in an avid strive to fulfill burning desires. This chapter distinguishes between desire-relevant and desire-irrelevant priming procedures. Desire-relevant primes are directly related to the current pursuit of desire (e.g., being primed with money while experiencing a desire to obtain monetary rewards). In contrast, desire-irrelevant primes could not be related to currently pursued desires in any way (e.g., being primed with the color orange while experiencing the same desire to obtain monetary rewards). Chapter 2 shows that desire-relevant primes affect consumers when desire is not yet fulfilled but not when it has already been fulfilled. On the contrary, desire-irrelevant primes fail to exert their subtle influence on consumers when desire has not yet been fulfilled whereas priming effects surface upon desire fulfillment. Experiment 2.1 primed participants with pictures of money (vs. control) and showed that performance on a money-related task (i.e., coin and currency symbol identification task; Schmeichel, Harmon-Jones, and Harmon-Jones 2010) during which participants were asked to discriminate between real or bogus money-related symbols was affected by the exposure to the desire-relevant primes only when desire for money was not yet fulfilled. Upon desire fulfillment, money-related primes lost their relevance for participants and, as a result, no effects of primes on the performance on a money-related task could be observed. Experiment 2.2 and 2.3 concentrated on the influence of desire-irrelevant primes on consumer behavior, tying priming procedures yet again to diverging states during the pursuit of desire, characterized by varying motivational intensity (unfulfilled desire vs. fulfilled desire). Experiment 2.2 primed participants with weapon-primes, consecutively exploring the accessibility of aggression-related thoughts (Anderson, Benjamin, and Bartholow 1998). The subsequent Stroop task (Sparrow, Liu, and Wegner 2011), conducted after the priming procedure either in the ‘unfulfilled-desire’ or ‘fulfilled-desire’ states,
demonstrated enhanced accessibility of aggression-related thoughts following exposure to weapon-primes only when desire for money was fulfilled but not when it was still to be fulfilled. Experiment 2.3 demonstrated how desire facilitates or interferes with priming procedures in a purely marketing context. In this study, Dutch participants were primed with the color of the desktop background (orange vs. white). This study explored how such a subtle alternation in the decisional context shapes consecutive product preferences. Participants primed with the orange color indicated greater preference for Dutch (vs. foreign) products when the desire for money had been already fulfilled. In contrast, when participants had not yet managed to fulfill the desire for money, the color of the background failed to exert its subtle influence on consumer product preferences. Experiment 2.4 extended findings from experiments 2.1-2.3, investigating how desire-relevance of context in which priming procedure occurs could additionally beget either facilitation or interference of priming effects. Experiment 2.4 showed that goal-irrelevant primes are processed in a top-down, desire-centered fashion in desire-relevant contexts. As a result, they shape consumer judgment, decision-making and, ultimately, behavior when desire has not been fulfilled but not when it has already been fulfilled. Participants in this study were primed with haptic stimuli, touching either a soft piece of blanket or a hard piece of wood (Jiang, Gorn, Galli, and Chattopadhayay 2016). These tactile stimuli formed subsequent recommendations of logos provided for an innovative product concept—bamboo lunchbox—but only for ‘unfulfilled’ but not for the ‘fulfilled’ desire states. All in all, Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a more fine-grained perspective on priming, incorporating motivations resulting from desires that could be brought to the priming setting into our current understanding of why, when, and how priming effects come about.
5.1.2 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 connects motivational underpinnings resulting from goal pursuit with consumer responsiveness to assortment cues, specifically assortment structure. It focuses on the visual configuration of products within an assortment (i.e., equivalent assortments composed of products varying only in a few attributes vs. nonequivalent assortments composed of products varying in multiple attributes; Bar-Hillel 2015) and demonstrates under what specific conditions such varying configurations could have downstream consequences for consumer choices. Chapter 3 shows that, when concurrent shopping-independent (i.e., alternative) goals are active next to the shopping goal, they can render consumers resistant to the subtle influence of assortment cues. In contrast, when such goals have already been attained, consumers open up to the subtle impact of assortment cues and make choices driven by the assortment structure (Bar-Hillel 2015). Experiments 3.1 and 3.2 establish the basic effects, showing that consumers select products located closer to the center of an assortment while choosing from an assortment composed of equivalent options (Experiment 3.1), whereas consumer product choices shift more towards the edge of an assortment when faced with non-equivalent assortments but only when alternative goals have already been completed and not when they are still active (Experiment 3.2). Subsequent studies use within-subject designs to deliver tests of these findings that are more conservative. Experiment 3.3 demonstrates the same effects of assortment structure on consumer product choice location while exposing each participant to both types of assortments (equivalent vs. non-equivalent) and asking them to select products either before potential monetary rewards have been obtained (alternative goal: active) or after they have been obtained (alternative goal: completed). Experiment 3.4 replicates these results in the field using both within-subjects designs for product choice tasks (equivalent vs. non-equivalent assortments) and more naturalistic manipulation of alternative goal pursuit, asking participants to make product choices either before (alternative goal: active) or after
(alternative goal: completed) having eaten at a restaurant. Synthesizing, Chapter 3 builds on the Goal Systems Theory (Kruglanski et al. 2002) and goal shielding (Shah, Friedman, and Kruglanski 2002), extending, as proposed by these theoretical perspectives, implications to the domain of susceptibility to subtle marketing cues associated with specific goals.

5.1.3 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the goal of gaining money or preventing monetary losses from happening, investigating downstream consequences of monetary gains and losses on the attentional scope and the susceptibility to priming procedures. This chapter separates consumer goal pursuit (obtaining gains vs. preventing losses) into two stages of varying motivational intensity (Gable and Harmon-Jones 2010, 2011)—anticipation versus experience of monetary gains versus losses. Experiment 4.1 replicates previous findings related to monetary gains, showing that anticipation of monetary gains narrows the attentional scope while experiencing gains broadens the scope of attention. In contrast, the effects reverse for monetary losses—while anticipation of monetary losses broadens the attentional scope, the experience of monetary losses narrows the scope of attention. Experiment 4.2 not only validates these findings but also extends them to the area of susceptibility to priming procedures, showing that consumers are not only responsive towards priming procedures that are aligned with currently held motivations, but also the location of the primes is of importance for their effectiveness. As a result, primes delivered beyond the currently maintained attentional scope fail to influence subsequent judgment, decision-making, and behavior.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The present dissertation enriches our current understanding of consumer susceptibility to the influence of subtle marketing cues in several ways. First, it provides a novel
perspective on consumer information processing from the perspective of the experienced desire or pursued goals. Desire—the feeling of wanting to have or do something (Hoffman and Van Dillen 2012)—has been labeled as the new hot spot in self-control research. Nonetheless, research connecting the experience of desire with information processing is still in its nascent stage. The relation between desire and attentional processes has been investigated predominantly to clarify how objects of desire capture consumer attention, leading to a never-ending spiral of desire-centered cognitions and eventually escalation of desire (Hoffman and Van Dillen 2012). Chapter 2 demonstrates how desire shapes consumer processing of subtle contextual cues, specifically primes, and extends the current research on the desire to processing external information that is not primarily related to the current pursuit of desire. It shows how desire acts as a filtering lens, permeating information that is functional for the desire pursuit and interfering at the same time with information that is desire-irrelevant. The Elaborated Intrusion Theory (Andrade, May, van Dillen, and Kavanagh 2015) is one of the foundational theories uncovering the various shades of desire and its operations. It elucidates how experienced desire sparks the incessant loop of desire-centered cognitions which prevents desire from waning and intensifying the attention to the objects of desire. In line with Elaborated Intrusion Theory, desire is perceived as a conscious wanting that is enriched by a prolonged cognitive elaboration on the target of desire. Such cognitive elaboration affectively begets charged sensory imagery that subsequently reinstates a desire-centered loop of thoughts. This dissertation demonstrates how this intense focus on the objects of desire interferes with processing of desire-irrelevant information, making consumers resistant to desire-irrelevant priming procedures when desire has not yet been fulfilled (cf., Chapter 2). Avid striving to fulfill desire channels consumer thoughts and cognitions towards external stimuli (e.g., primes) that are desire-relevant rather than desire-irrelevant. Fulfilling currently pursued desire results in satiation, alternating the effectiveness
of priming procedures—while desire-relevant primes lose their importance, desire-irrelevant ones become more prominent, exerting their subtle influence on consumers. Various models clarifying when and how priming effects come about (e.g., Collins and Loftus 1975; Loersch and Payne 2011) elucidate that exposure to primes has an impact on subsequent consumer judgment, decision-making, and behavior only after the accessibility of prime-related thoughts is enhanced. The Elaborated Intrusion Theory (Andrade, May, van Dillen, and Kavanagh 2015) helps to grasp why desire, predominantly through reiterative cognitive elaboration on objects of desire, interferes with the accessibility of prime-related thoughts when desire has not yet been fulfilled, and primes are not relevant for the current pursuit of desire.

The findings presented in Experiment 2.4 showing how priming effectiveness is contextually malleable could be further related to the grounded theory of desire (Papies and Barsalou 2015), depicting desire as deeply embedded in the situational context. Desire fulfillment occurs within broader temporary contexts that are composed of the setting, people, objects, background actions, events, emotions, and so forth. According to the grounded theory of desire, all these peripheral-to-the-desired-objects facets and features of the context are stored in memory in the form of situated conceptualizations. Such conceptualizations are likely to be triggered at a later point in time, resulting in a specific revival of desire upon exposure to desire-related stimuli. As such, the fact that primes, which could be seen as seemingly irrelevant for the pursuit of desire at a first glance, become processed and used if the context in which they could be activated is related to similar underlying motivations as pursued desire constitutes yet another representation of the grounded theory of desire. Desire colored by the intense motivational drive shapes consumer cognitions in startling ways. This motivational state can be so overpowering for consumers that desire-centered cognitions are
triggered by even subtle reminders related to the pursuit of desire, instantly making consumers put on their desire-centered glasses while looking at the world around them.

Chapter 2 additionally enriches our current understanding of priming effects, implementing a more dynamic perspective on when primes guide consumer judgment, decision-making, and behavior and when, rather on the contrary, consumer responsiveness to primes becomes attenuated. Recent concerns about the replicability of priming effects (Cesario 2014) opened up the discussion of whether we can rely on the validity of priming effects identified in the literature. Cesario (2014) pinpoints that the variability observed across various demonstrations of priming should not result in an ad hoc revoking of the entire priming paradigm. On the contrary, diverging findings should prompt exploration of more refined representations of contexts in which priming effects come about and in which, in contrast, they fail to surface. Due to the fact that priming effects are sensitive to a wide range of individual-level and contextual variables (Cesario 2014), the inevitable next step in the development of priming research will be a more detailed and flexible exploration of the factors driving the variability in responses to priming procedures. The second chapter of this dissertation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of priming effects by concentrating on consumer desires, which could be brought to the priming setting and shape consumer responses to priming procedures. By zooming in on the stage preceding the exposure to primes, introducing prior desires having a direct impact on which primes are processed and used and which ones are foregone, the second chapter of this dissertation answers the recent call for research on anti-priming (Janiszewski and Wyer 2014)—interference of priming effects. Following Janiszewski and Wyer (2014), it demonstrates not only when priming effects are consequential for consumer behavior but also when their effectiveness becomes attenuated.
Whereas Chapter 2 concentrates specifically on facilitation and interference of priming effects when consumers look at the world through desire-tinted glasses, Chapter 3 zooms in on the responsiveness to assortment cues (i.e., assortment structure) that could nudge consumers towards specific decisions because of their visual configuration as a function of consumer goal pursuit. This particular chapter extends both the Goal Systems Theory (Kruglanski et al. 2002) and the Goal Shielding Theory (Shah, Friendman, and Kruglanski 2002) while demonstrating that activation of alternative goals coinciding with the act of shopping leads to a decreased responsiveness to assortment cues associated with the act of shopping. As such, Chapter 3 contributes to the current knowledge of the context-driven consumer, showing not only when consumers make choices determined by their environment but also when such contextual effects are blocked. Besides extending current literature on multiple-goal pursuit (e.g., Louro, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2007), means valuation and devaluation (e.g., Brendl, Markman, and Messner 2003) and the context-driven consumer (e.g., Pham, Goukens, Lehmann, and Stuart 2010), Chapter 3 nicely dovetails with the literature related to position effects—consumer preferences for specific locations within assortments as a function of either goal anticipation or goal attainment and assortment structure. Literature so far is still ambivalent with respect to consumer biases towards specific product locations (Atalay, Bodur, and Rasolofarison 2012; Christenfeld 1995; Valenzuela and Raghubir 2009, Ert and Fleischer 2016; Li and Epley 2009; Nisbett and Wilson 1977). One stream of research demonstrates that consumers are more likely to select products from the center of an assortment due to their beliefs about these products’ popularity (Valenzuela and Raghubir 2009). This center-stage effect was further corroborated by other researchers, e.g., Atalay, Bodur and Rasolofarison 2012; Christenfeld 1995. An alternative, competing account predicts that consumers prefer products placed closer to the edge of a choice set, being it either the right-hand side of the assortment (Nisbett and Wilson 1977), the top or the
bottom (Ert and Fleischer 2016), or the first or the last position (i.e., primacy and recency effects, Li and Epley 2009).

In an attempt to reconcile these competing perspectives concerning consumer preferences for specific product locations, Bar-Hillel (2015) tried to qualify previous findings regarding position effects coming up with the concept of reachability—the object that is easiest to reach is supposed to be chosen and, additionally, this process of reaching could occur either on the physical or a mental level. As a result, consumers are expected to select products from the center of assortments composed of evidently equivalent products (assortments composed of products varying only in a few attributes) since the item located in the vicinity of the middle is physically the closest to them. In contrast, in the case of nonequivalent assortments (composed of products varying in multiple attributes), consumers need to process presented options sequentially starting from the edge of the assortment. Thus, a choice closer to the edge of the assortments is more likely since these products are, for nonequivalent assortments, mentally closer to the chooser—they are processed first. Interestingly, Chapter 3 replicates position effects proposed by Bar-Hillel (2015), qualifying consumer preferences for specific product locations from the perspective of assortment structures (equivalent vs. non-equivalent). Nonetheless, alternative goals, besides the shopping goal, that are also active play a pivotal role in this successful replication that is presented in Chapter 3. This chapter of this dissertation demonstrates that responsiveness to assortment cues is attenuated when alternative goals coincide with the act of shopping.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation contributes to our current understanding of the phenomenon of loss aversion (Kahneman and Tversky 1979)—the idea that losses loom larger than gains and its relationship with attentional scope. Building on the research of Gable and Harmon-Jones (2010; 2011), Chapter 4 shows that the downstream attentional processes fundamentally diverge in either the anticipation or the experience states of losses versus
gains. While attentional scope narrows in the gain anticipation state and broadens in the gain experience state, the attentional tuning operates qualitatively different for losses. As proposed and empirically demonstrated in Chapter 4, the attentional scope for monetary losses, in contrast to monetary gains, broadens in the loss anticipation state whereas it narrows down following loss experience. These findings, however likely to be seen as surprising at first glance, corroborate findings from the recent stream in the literature exploring the disparity between anticipation and experience of losses (Andrade and Iyer 2009; Andrade, Claro, and Islam 2014; Boyce, Wood, Banks, Clark, and Brown 2013). The findings demonstrated in Chapter 4 support the theoretical account presenting loss aversion as a phenomenon also occurring in the loss experience state and not merely in the loss anticipation state. In this way, akin to Boyce et al. (2013), Chapter 4 challenges the traditional account, envisioning losses as aversive and reducing subjective well-being particularly when anticipated. The subtle cognitive processes—attentional tuning induced by anticipation vs. experience of monetary losses—could be interpreted as a psychological defense mechanism that is aimed at preventing any potential future losses from happening which, based on experience, are perceived as both painful and, therefore, undesirable. In addition, findings presented in Chapter 4 refine our current understanding of the effectiveness of priming procedures, showing that not only goal-relevance but also currently maintained attentional scope needs to be taken into account for priming to be consequential for consumer behavior.

Furthermore, Chapter 4 contributes to the discussion concerning the process of attentional tuning. The results presented in Chapter 4 could be seen as contradicting the findings documented by Levine and Edelstein's theorizing (2009). Levine and Edelstein (2009) classified emotions into two major categories: (1) pre-goal emotions (e.g., desire or anger), reflecting the appraisal that goal-directed actions will need to be taken in the near future, and (2) post-goal emotions (e.g., happiness or sadness), indicating that successful goal
attainment or goal failure has already occurred. Building on this framework, follow-up research showed that pre-goal emotions induce attention narrowing whereas post-goal emotions evoke attention broadening (Kaplan, Van Damme, and Levine 2012). In line with this research stream, we could expect that pre-goal negative states (e.g., loss anticipation states) will consequently lead to attention narrowing whereas post-goals negative states (loss experience states) will entail broadening of attentional scope. Nonetheless, our perspective of the attentional tuning process should be more fine-grained. Losses should be considered as unique experiences that attune the attentional scope in its own way because of the specific effects they exert on motivational intensity. As a result, we corroborate the findings of Gable and Harmon-Jones (2010, 2011) while demonstrating that motivational intensity should be perceived as a crucial factor influencing the scope of attention.

5.3 Practical Implications

Kurt Lewin once highlighted: ‘There is nothing so practical as a good theory.’ This dissertation is no exception. Despite the fact that the nature of this dissertation can be seen as primarily theoretical, the significant practical implications originating from this work should not be overlooked. It proposes a more dynamic, flexible perspective on consumer susceptibility to subtle marketing cues. As such, it refines our current understanding of the incessant tension between consumers and their environments, showing not only when consumers fall prey to the subtle influence of subtle marketing cues in their decision-making but also when, in contrast, such cues fail to govern consumer decisions. Numerous marketplace settings could be seen as being saturated with the consumer pursuit of desire. Consumers visit various restaurants to satisfy their desire for fine dining experiences and exquisite tastes, they connect with friends and family on Facebook and WhatsApp in order to fulfill their desire for belongingness, or they buy a can of Sprite on a hot day in order to quench their thirst. Brands oftentimes address various consumer desires while developing
marketing communication strategies. Volvo satisfies consumer desire for security, Old Spice and Victoria’s Secret tackle consumer desire to be wanted and attractive, and Kindle could be seen as a brand that helps consumers constantly develop and grow. This research shows how experiencing desire makes consumers look at the world through desire-tinted glasses, inducing attentional tuning towards desire-relevant cues and dismissal of desire-irrelevant ones when desire has not yet been fulfilled. By incorporating pre-existing desires into the exploration of priming effectiveness, Chapter 2 shows not only when priming effects surface, driving subsequent judgment, decision-making, and behavior but also when they fail to steer consumer behavior in prime-consistent directions. Marketers frequently use various subtle cues furnished in the environment to navigate consumer decisions towards specific products and services. Chapter 2 demonstrates that subtle ways of guiding consumers in the marketplace could become more effective through concentrating on the pre-exposure stage to primes by either exposing consumers to desire-relevant primes when desire has not yet been fulfilled or desire-irrelevant ones upon desire fulfillment. In addition, in an online setting where advertisers have more control over what ads are shown to consumers and can incorporate prior search history in their ad exposure strategies, findings presented in Chapter 2 become even more pertinent. Imagine consumers shopping for highly desired products such as the new model of Leica cameras or designer clothes from Balenciaga. Findings from this dissertation applied to the desire-centered consumer mind-set would predict that advertisements related to search terms are expected to impact consumer decision-making, but the influence of advertisements that are irrelevant or only loosely related would become inhibited. Indeed, initial research into the effectiveness of personalized and location-based digital and mobile advertising confirms these preliminary predictions (Edwards, Lee, and Li 2002; van Doorn and Hoekstra 2013; van't Riet, Hünn, Ketelaar, Khan, Konig, Rozendaal, and Markopoulos 2016). All in all, this dissertation could be seen as a tailored toolbox for
implementing priming procedures in the marketplace, demonstrating when priming procedures succeed and when they fail as a function of experienced desire.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation provides several practical implications for both consumers and retailers. This section of the dissertation demonstrates how alternative goals concurrent with the shopping goal can block the subtle influence of assortment cues on consumer decision-making. Since contextual cues are often responsible for impulsive purchases (e.g., Donovan, Rositter, Marcoolyn, and Nesdale 1994), findings from Chapter 3 could be construed as a piece of advice to consumers to do daily shopping while being preoccupied with other, concurrent motivations, e.g., on the way to a cinema or to meet with friends. Inhibition of assortment cues in the goal anticipation states could lead to less context-driven choices. Additionally, applying the findings in the domain of consumer well-being could help store or restaurant owners to nudge consumers into healthier product choices while aligning locations of specific products with currently held motivations. Last but not least, shelf allocation constitutes one of the most important retail strategies and is aimed at attracting consumer attention to specific products in order to boost their sales (Hwang, Choi, and Lee 2005). This research could be interpreted as a call for a more dynamic, motivationally malleable perspective on shelf allocation. Incorporating more dynamic shelf management by shifting, for instance, certain options to the edge or to the center of an assortment depending on the assortment structure and time of the day could result in greater profits. Findings presented in Chapter 3 significantly enrich our current understanding of consumer decision-making in product categories where shopping is not habitual or based on strong feelings of loyalty.

Chapter 4 further expands demonstrated in this dissertation unique perspective on the context-driven consumer by looking at the primary research subject from yet another perspective. Concentrating on the attentional scope perspective, it demonstrates that consumers attend to subtle contextual information not only when it is aligned with prevailing goals and
desires but also when it is presented within their currently maintained attentional scope. This finding further expands the practical implications of previous chapters. Interestingly, it shows that not only pre-existing motives underlying present desire or goal pursuits should be taken into account while nudging consumers into specific choices but also the attentional scope, thus the extent to which external information could be attended.

5.4 Avenues for Future Research

Follow-up research should further investigate factors that could result in the interference of priming effects. Chapter 2 showed that desire interferes with desire-irrelevant priming effects due to intrusive, desire-centered cognitions that hijack working memory and prevent desire from waning. Ruminative thoughts spiraling around desire are proposed to be the main source of interference with desire-irrelevant priming effects in the ‘unfulfilled desire’ states. Along these lines of argumentation, other experiences and affective states could be proposed as factors that could interfere with priming due to the intrusiveness of thoughts and cognitions they spark. Future research could focus on particularly prevalent, yet scarcely researched affective states that may have significant implications for consumer behaviour, and more specifically for priming effectiveness. For example, one particularly negative affective state that could also modulate consumer responsiveness to priming and subtle marketing cues is depression. The World Health Organization (WHO) has ranked depression among one of the leading causes of disability worldwide (Kessler & Bromet, 2013). Nonetheless, it has been hardly researched in the consumer domain to date.

First and foremost, depression is characterized by incessant rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema 2000). As such, it seems very likely that even slight reminders triggering depressive thoughts among people suffering from depression could attenuate priming effects while people become preoccupied with an unceasingly spreading cloud of depressive cognitions. In the same vein, anxiety and anxious feelings instigate a never-ending loop of
intrusive, threat-focused representations and thoughts (Nolen-Hoeksema 2000) that could also lead to attenuating priming effects when anxiety is active. Related to anxiety, feelings of fear, especially if pervasive and difficult to mitigate, could be yet another factor attenuating priming effects. Characteristic for both anxiety and fear is the experience of uncertainty, which could be identified as a common denominator for the other two emotions. Uncertainty comes in human life in different forms, and it is an inevitable part of our everyday experiences. A faster paced life and incessantly increasing complexity of our reality due to, for instance, technological advancements make our lives even more uncertain. The lack of knowledge about the outcome of specific undertakings (goals, tasks, plans) triggers a continuous loop of worrying for numerous people (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, and Lyubomirsky 2008) and outcome-related thoughts. Such cognitive tuning on the feelings of uncertainty, additionally boosted by the lack of closure, is also likely to attenuate priming effects.

Further, an interesting avenue for future research would be to investigate various factors that either inhibit consumer responsiveness to assortment cues or, in contrast, make it more pronounced. Similar factors that could moderate the priming effects demonstrated in Chapter 2 could also prove to be relevant in this more shopping-related setting. The most relevant ones that could spark interesting new ideas within the area of consumer responsiveness to assortment cues are anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. On the other hand, the findings presented in Chapter 3 could also be applied to within-store settings. Across studies presented in Chapter 3, participants pursued experimentally instigated goals (e.g., by means of reward pursuit) or goals resulting from their visceral states (the goal of satisfying hunger). Nonetheless, also within one shopping trip, consumers can have multiple salient goals that drive their decision-making and determine responsiveness to assortment cues. Imagine going on a shopping trip with a specific goal in mind—for instance, buying washing powder in
order to do the laundry later in the day. Findings presented in Chapter 3 predict that you will not be driven in your decision-making by assortment cues from other product categories until the very moment of purchasing the product you currently need the most—namely, the washing powder. Only afterward when the product that is needed the most has been acquired would consumers be expected to open up and become responsive to assortment cues from other product categories.

Whereas one possibly fruitful avenue for future research would be to further follow the path of inhibition of responsiveness to contextual cues, a fascinating alternative would be to explore when susceptibility to contextual cues becomes enhanced. One emotion that could particularly be taken into consideration is awe—an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that transcend current frames of reference (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, and Keltner 2015). Awe diverts the attention from the self (Bai et al. 2017; Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007), reduces impatience (Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker 2012), and promotes focus on the present moment (Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker 2012). Therefore, it could be expected that experiences of awe make consumers more responsive to subtle marketing cues since they are more likely to scrutinize external information and become less sensitive towards internal triggers. As such, we could expect facilitation rather than inhibition of contextual effects on consumer decision-making following experiences of awe. This proposition still awaits thorough empirical exploration.

Finally, Chapter 4 concentrated specifically on the connection between anticipation versus experience of monetary gains versus losses and their effects on the scope of attention. Future research could further investigate whether effects presented in Chapter 4 also hold for non-monetary gains and losses. Additionally, exploring additional moderating variables that could play a role in this particular setting could become a fruitful avenue for follow-up research. It would be interesting to explore whether our findings reverse for losses of greater
magnitude (Estle, Green, Myerson, and Holt 2006). Furthermore, uncertainty tied to the payoffs or potential losses could also modulate the effects that are presented in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. One could expect that the greater the uncertainty, the more pronounced the effects of anticipation versus experience of monetary gains versus losses on the attentional scope. Eventually, varying the level of exposure (supraliminal vs. subliminal exposure) to reward or loss cues could further refine our current understanding of monetary gains and losses and their effect on the attentional scope (Bijleveld, Custers, and Aarts 2010).

5.5 Limitations

Contextual effects can be seen as being very subtle; therefore, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of our empirical work. Across studies, we followed the recommendations of Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011) regarding sample sizes and attempted to have at least 20 participants per condition. For each study presented in this dissertation, we aimed at having at least 30 respondents per condition, collecting as much data as possible within a time frame of two weeks as stipulated by the FEB Research Lab of the University of Groningen for a single data collection opportunity. Nonetheless, recently, new recommendations regarding sample sizes have been proposed in the field of social psychology to warrant sufficient statistical power (Nelson, Simmons, and Simonsohn 2018). Accordingly, it could be desirable to recruit more participants for studies presented in this dissertation in order to further validate findings of this empirical work. Nevertheless, observing such subtle effects as priming effects or position effects across our studies with study designs complying with the earlier methodological paradigm in the field of social psychology gives us sufficient confidence in the results and our projects that originated from thorough bottom-up theorizing. Moreover, sensitivity analyses conducted in Chapter 3 indicated that our samples were sufficiently large to identify effects more subtle than the
average effect sizes in social psychology (Richard, Bond, and Stokes-Zoota 2003). These post-hoc power analyses could be generalized across most of the studies presented in this dissertation.

We also tried to comply with recent recommendations for ‘keeping it real in experimental research’ (Morales, Amir, and Lee 2017) while exploring contextual effects in the field. Desires and goal pursuit are pervasive in consumer lives, guiding consumers continuously through their daily endeavors. Across two studies presented in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation, one of the visceral states—hunger—and its effects on priming effects (Chapter 2) as well as contextual effects of assortment structure (Chapter 3) were investigated. Future research could concentrate on a broader scope of visceral states such as thirst, sexual desire, or cigarette cravings (Loewenstein 1996) and their influence on the contextual phenomena presented in this dissertation.

Chapter 2 focused on investigating how experiencing desire interferes with priming procedures. Across four studies, this chapter took into account predominantly visual primes, incorporating haptic priming procedures only once. The fourth study from Chapter 2 demonstrated that the interference effects of priming are not a result of not seeing the primes but a result of a reduced accessibility of prime-related thoughts. In order to further validate this finding, future research could explore how other sensory primes, such as olfactory primes (Smeets and Dijksterhuis 2014) or auditory primes (North 1999), drive consumer judgment, decision-making, and ultimately behavior.

Last but not least, Chapter 3 zoomed in on the exploration of either facilitation or inhibition of contextual effects as a function of multiple-goal pursuit. Across four studies, it demonstrated the hypothesized effects related to consumer responsiveness to assortment cues (i.e., assortment structure). Despite the fact that we predict these effects to hold also in other contexts, future research can explore whether consumers indeed also become less susceptible
to the subtle influence of, for instance, products eliciting even only moderate levels of disgust (e.g., feminine napkins) (Morales and Fitzsimons 2007) or the flooring they walk on (Meyers-Levy, Zhu, and Jiang 2009) when multiple goals are pursued.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

As Haruki Murakami writes in his broadly acclaimed novel “Kafka on the Shore”: “Every object’s in flux. The Earth, time, concepts, love, life, faith, justice, evil—they’re all fluid and in transition. They don’t stay in one form or in one place forever. The whole universe is like some big FedEx box.” By showing a more dynamic, flexible, meaning-making and motivationally malleable perspective on the subtle influence of contextual cues on consumer decision-making, this dissertation demonstrated how fluid representations of contextual information could be either consequential for consumer behavior or, rather on the contrary, fail to give consumers the gentle nudge to change their default choices. As such, this dissertation presents a novel perspective on consumer responsiveness to subtle marketing cues. This refined, a more fluid perspective on contextual effects driving daily consumer choices could be seen as yet another step towards a richer understanding of context-driven consumers. Regardless, one conclusion seems to be inevitable at this point. Consumers, torn between their daily goals and desires, seem to be like small universes within the whole universe; small FedEx boxes within one big FedEx box of reality.